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**“God Has a Plan for Your Life”:
Personalized Life Providence (PLP) in Postwar American
Evangelicalism**

By Amber R. Thomas

**Doctor of Philosophy
University of Edinburgh
2018**

DECLARATION:

I, Amber R. Thomas, hereby certify that this thesis has been written by me; that it is the record of work carried out by me; and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for higher degree.

Signature

Date 30 August 2018

ABSTRACT

Based largely upon popular periodicals, archival materials, conference addresses, and mass-market books, this thesis combines intellectual and cultural history to explore how the meaning behind the evangelical commonplace, “God has a plan for your life,” changed in post-World War II America, ultimately exchanging an ethos of self-denial for self-fulfillment by the early 1980s. The term “Personalized Life Providence” (PLP) is proposed for the integration of three Reformation-rooted ideas—vocation, providence, and discernment—into the discussion of finding God’s plan for one’s life. Chapter one sketches the Anglo-American development of these concepts from the Puritan era to the early twentieth century, as they intersected with Common Sense philosophy, “Higher Life” teaching, the student-missionary movement, and inter-war fundamentalism. Chapter two begins the analysis of PLP’s dissemination throughout Chicago-centered evangelical student-parachurch organizations in the 1940s. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Youth for Christ conflated PLP with personal holiness and, after the war, a resurgent American foreign-missionary movement, as displayed particularly in the texts of IVCF’s Urbana conferences. Chapter three focuses on Henrietta Mears, Christian Education Director of First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California. Mears’s Sunday-School publications and college ministry reveal PLP’s embrace of irenic neo-evangelicalism in the 1950s, coupled with a revised discernment process. Chapter four identifies the emergence of the “gospel of God’s plan” from Mears’s protégés, specifically Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright, Presbyterian minister Richard Halverson, and evangelist Billy Graham. Epitomized by the phrase, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” the first of Bright’s Four Spiritual Laws, this gospel resonated with the religious revival, anti-Communist rhetoric, and psychological emphasis on self-actualization pervading American culture from 1947 to 1965. Chapter five argues that anti-Western sentiments in the 1960s eroded PLP’s evocation of missionary sacrifice in neo-evangelical circles. YFC encouraged teenagers to pursue culturally influential professions rather than traditional evangelism, while IVCF promulgated inconsistent teaching on discerning a foreign-missionary call in revolutionary times. Chapter six explores PLP’s relationship to the widespread cultural shift toward self-fulfillment in the 1970s, as reflected both in evolving teaching on women’s roles, career choice, and missionary service, and in PLP books styled after mass-market, self-help literature.

LAY SUMMARY

Based largely upon popular periodicals, archival materials, conference addresses, and mass-market books, this thesis combines intellectual and cultural history to explore how the meaning behind the evangelical commonplace, “God has a plan for your life,” changed in post-World War II America, ultimately exchanging an ethos of self-denial for self-fulfillment by the early 1980s. The term “Personalized Life Providence” (PLP) is proposed for the integration of three Reformation-rooted ideas—vocation, providence, and discernment—into the discussion of finding God’s plan for one’s life. Chapter one sketches the Anglo-American development of these concepts from the Puritan era to the early twentieth century, as they intersected with common-sense philosophy, “Higher Life” teaching, the student-missionary movement, and inter-war fundamentalism. Chapter two begins the analysis of PLP’s dissemination throughout Chicago-centered evangelical student-parachurch organizations in the 1940s. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Youth for Christ conflated PLP with personal holiness and, after the war, a resurgent American foreign-missionary movement, as displayed particularly in the texts of IVCF’s Urbana conferences. Chapter three focuses on Henrietta Mears, Christian Education Director of First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California. Mears’s Sunday-School publications and college ministry reveal PLP’s embrace of irenic neo-evangelicalism in the 1950s, coupled with a revised discernment process. Chapter four identifies the emergence of the “gospel of God’s plan” from Mears’s protégés, specifically Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright, Presbyterian minister Richard Halverson, and evangelist Billy Graham. Epitomized by the phrase, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” the first of Bright’s Four Spiritual Laws, this gospel resonated with the religious revival, anti-Communist rhetoric, and psychological emphasis on self-actualization pervading American culture from 1947 to 1965. Chapter five argues that anti-Western sentiments in the 1960s eroded PLP’s evocation of missionary sacrifice in neo-evangelical circles. YFC encouraged teenagers to pursue culturally influential professions rather than traditional evangelism, while IVCF promulgated inconsistent teaching on discerning a foreign-missionary call in revolutionary times. Chapter six argues that neo-evangelical PLP imbibed the widespread cultural shift toward self-fulfillment in the 1970s, as reflected both in evolving teaching on women’s roles, career choice, and missionary service, and in PLP books styled after mass-market, self-help literature.

ABBREVIATIONS

BGCA	Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois
CBC	College Briefing Conference
CCC	Campus Crusade for Christ
CRUA	CRU Archives in Orlando, Florida
GLA	Gospel Light Archives (previously in Ventura, CA)
IVCF	InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
PLP	Personalized Life Providence
SFMF	Student Foreign Missions Fellowship
SMP	The Sound Mind Principle
SVM	Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions
YFC	Youth for Christ

DEDICATION

*To my family, my new husband Matt (an unexpected gift from God), and the eminent Prof
Stanley for supporting me,
and to the single, Christian sisterhood for inspiring me.*

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Introduction

In 2002, California mega-church pastor Rick Warren released *The Purpose Driven Life*, a 40-day devotional study. By 2005, according to the Barna Research Group, 25% of all American adults had read it.¹ By 2012, Warren's tome had sold 30 million copies—making it the bestselling book in United States publishing history.² To these readers, Warren proclaimed that “before He created the world,” God had planned “the color of your skin,” “your natural talents,” “your personality”—all the details of “the days of your life in advance.”³ No person was an “accident” but was “designed with a purpose in mind.” *The Purpose Driven Life* catapulted Warren into the national spotlight. Not only did President George W. Bush consult him, in 2009 he delivered the prayer for the inauguration of President Barack Obama. Like “America's Pastor” Billy Graham, who in the 1950s told multitudes that the secret of true peace and happiness was to be “born again,” Warren reached contemporary seekers and nominal Christians with a promise of a life imbued with divine purpose and meaning. Indeed, his was not a new message. One of his mentors, Bill Bright, founder of university ministry Campus Crusade for Christ, had promulgated a similar gospel alongside Graham: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

Like much popular religious language, the phrase, “God's plan for your life” may appear to be doctrinally vacuous. However, this thesis will suggest that the discourse represents the convergence of three serious theological concepts: divine providence, vocation, and spiritual discernment, ideas that have powerfully shaped Christian thought and Western culture, especially since the Protestant Reformation. The genius of twentieth-

¹ CNN Belief Blog, “Short Takes: Gauging the Impact of 'Purpose Driven Life,' 10 Years On,” November 29, 2012. <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/29/short-takes-gauging-the-impact-of-purpose-driven-life-10-years-on/> (accessed January 5, 2014).

² Michael Longinow, “Evangelical Media and Ministry,” in *Evangelicals and Popular Culture, Vol. 3: Public Figures, Popular Press, Places, and Events*, edited by Robert H. Woods, Jr., (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 10.

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 31-32.

century evangelicals has been in their ability to distill centuries of theological reflection into a mellifluous refrain.

“Personalized life providence” (hereafter, PLP) is the name I wish to give this phenomenon, despite my possibly contentious usage of “providence.” A common term in the Reformation and early modern era, “providence” denoted God’s benevolent care over creation and intervention in the affairs of nations and individuals. Beginning with the Enlightenment, as philosopher Charles Taylor explains in his magisterial *Sources of the Self*, “Providence was understood in general terms; it was reflected in the regular disposition of things.”⁴ It was anthropomorphized, as Deists and later humanists began to view modern society as the fulfillment of God’s ultimate plan to govern the world through rationality. Taylor continues, “The Deists had no more place for the ‘particular providences,’ God’s interventions in the stories of individuals and nations, which were at the center of much popular piety and were extremely important to the orthodox.”⁵

Continuing into the twenty-first century, evangelical theologian and spokesperson Roger Olson has argued that explicit assent to God’s “providence” over “history and nature” remains a central tenet of historic, orthodox Christianity. Allowing for a spectrum of views, ranging from “detailed” to “limited,” Olson contrasted belief in providence with “a popular alternative,” Deism.⁶ *Across the Spectrum*, a 2002 survey of contentious issues among evangelicals, presented the debate over providence as a question of whether “all things happen according to God’s sovereign will (the Calvinist view)” or “God limits his control by

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 272.

⁵ Idem, “Providential Deism,” in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 263; David W. Fergusson, “Divine Providence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 655-74.

⁶ Roger Olson, “Providence: Limited and Detailed,” in *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 187.

granting freedom (the Arminian view).”⁷ In terms of formal doctrine, evangelicals maintain no consensus on how God governs the world, as indicated by the lacunae on the topic in the 2007 *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* and the 2010 *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*. Unlike one evangelical theologian who groused about a “radically individualistic Calvinism” fixated upon “finding some more particular purpose or calling in one’s life,” “providence” here is broad enough to encompass both views.⁸ The modifiers, “personalized” and “life,” are added to stress the individualized character and earthly chronology of divine providence. While one’s specific work, or vocation, was central to PLP, “God’s plan for your life” also implied one’s selection of a marriage partner, residential location, Christian service, devotional walk, and—importantly—experiences of suffering or blessing.

This thesis aims to measure and explain the growing significance of PLP within American evangelicalism through the following questions: What are the origins of this teaching? How closely was it associated with the missionary movement? To what extent did God’s “wonderful” plan for one’s life stem from rising national prosperity? To what extent did God’s will become more individualistic? How did popular manuals on discerning God’s plan compare to mainstream self-help literature? How did PLP respond to changing gender norms? To what extent did PLP’s ethos shift from self-denial to self-fulfillment? Overall, how did PLP adapt to postwar American culture, in ways reflecting either evangelical accommodation or resistance to secularization?

Literature Review

In interpreting PLP as a *mélange* of providence, vocation, and discernment, the author draws upon broader histories of Protestant doctrine and spirituality, which will be

⁷ Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 7.

⁸ Ben Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), ix-x.

discussed in chapter one. A pertinent work focusing on American Christianity is Peter J. Thuesen's 2009 history, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine*. After surveying predestination throughout church history, Thuesen analyzed Catholic and various Protestant traditions' battles over the teaching that God elects some individuals to eternal salvation and the rest to punishment. For the epilogue, Thuesen interviewed elders at Warren's Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated megachurch about the *The Purpose-Driven Life*'s predestinarian theological underpinnings at a time when the SBC was fighting over the doctrine. The book's success suggested to Thuesen that many contemporary American Christians—or at least those of a conservative Protestant bent—assented to the idea that God controlled their destinies without the fear and trembling of their eternity-oriented, Puritan forebears.⁹ In other words, predestination was a palatable belief when recast as benevolent, temporal providence.

Histories of mid-century evangelicalism confirm the centrality of God's will or plan to the subculture. *America's Pastor*, Grant Wacker's magisterial study of Billy Graham's life and legacy, says that the evangelist's "contingent" view of history—in which humans act freely within the general bounds of the divine plan—was typical among evangelicals.¹⁰ In their seminal histories of American fundamentalism, George Marsden and Joel Carpenter acknowledge the importance of knowing and following the divine will, especially in ministry- or missions-related decisions.¹¹ The few substantial studies of modern evangelical understandings of God's will have been either theological or sociological in nature. Garry Friesen's 1978 Dallas Theological Seminary dissertation, published as *Decision Making and the Will of God* in 1980 by Multnomah Press, explicated a "traditional" evangelical view

⁹ Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 209-10.

¹⁰ Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2014), 35-36, 43.

¹¹ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: OUP, 1997), 82-84; George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 57-58.

disseminated through dozens of popular books and articles.¹² As Friesen approached the material theologically, and included scholarly works alongside popular books and articles, his study provided a springboard for my historical analysis and a primary source in its own right (chapter 6). In 2006, Baylor University religion professor Dennis J. Horton built upon Friesen's work by analyzing discernment methods propounded by newer titles on discerning God's will, as well as findings collected in the 2007 National Ministry Student Survey.¹³ Neither Horton's study nor the 2004 update of Friesen's book addressed the implications of historical and cultural context.¹⁴

Additional sociological and ethnographic work has addressed evangelical understandings of providence, calling, and discernment but are too limited in either scope or detail. A work sharing affinities with my own is Jeffrey Swanson's *Echoes of the Call*, an ethnography of 100 doctrinally conservative American missionaries serving in Ecuador in the late 1980s. Swanson, a sociologist, identified common features among the missionaries' narratives of being called by God to such service. R. Marie Griffith and Lynn Neal's studies of female evangelical culture reveal the centrality of trusting that God has detailed plans for women that may include suffering, singleness, and submission—to God or to male authority.¹⁵ In the 2012 monograph, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, psychological anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann studied members of two congregations in the Vineyard movement, an evangelically-oriented

¹² Garry Friesen, "God's Will as it Relates to Decision-Making" (Ph.d. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978); Ibid and J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980).

¹³ Dennis J. Horton, "Discerning Spiritual Discernment: Assessing Current Approaches for Understanding God's Will," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 7-31.

¹⁴ Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*, Rev. Ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004).

¹⁵ R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Lynne S. Neal, *Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Brenda Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

offshoot of the 1970s Charismatic Renewal in American Christianity. Luhrmann's subjects sought and interpreted "God's plan" for their lives through prayer practices such as detecting repeated mental images and listening for audible divine instructions.¹⁶ Luhrmann, however, failed to distinguish the Vineyard's charismatic idiosyncrasies from more mainstream evangelical spirituality, wherein testimonies of divine leading were still common but less vivid.

From Self-Denial to Self-Fulfillment? American Culture and Evangelical Accommodation

Driving much of this literature, are two questions: To what extent have evangelicals' language, expectations, beliefs, practices, and overall lifestyle reflected accommodation to secular American culture? More generally, how have evangelicals responded to social and historical shifts since World War II? Answering these questions requires a review of the scholarship on postwar American culture and character, particularly that suggesting the nation embraced an ethos of self-fulfillment. To be fair, cultural historian T.J. Jackson Lears has argued that this shift began in the early twentieth century, with the growth of advertising and consumerism.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the 1970s and early 1980s, multiple cultural commentators identified a troubling new surge of self-absorption. Essayist Tom Wolfe christened the 1970s the "Me Decade," historian and social critic Christopher Lasch bemoaned a "culture of narcissism," and pollster Daniel Yankelovich heralded the "new rules" of "self-fulfillment."¹⁸ Although one scholar interpreted the trends more optimistically, suggesting that the nation's "quest" for personal fulfillment entailed pursuit of

¹⁶ T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 293-98.

¹⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Actualization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox, and Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

¹⁸ Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and a Third Great Awakening," *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976; Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979).

social justice, sociologist Robert Bellah's grim portrayal exerted more lasting influence.¹⁹ From interviews and survey data of Baby Boomers, Bellah concluded that "expressive individualism" had overwhelmed Americans' concern for the common good. American religion, traditionally a force for civic welfare, had become another "lifestyle enclave" for like-minded individuals. Despite the alarmist tone, rereleases of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* appeared in 1996 and 2007.²⁰

Explanatory factors for this cultural shift included rising levels of education and affluence after World War II. University expansion began after the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (the "G.I." Bill) offered tuition waivers for military personnel, and it accelerated after the 1958 National Defense Education Act pumped unprecedented federal money into scientific research. From 1945 to 1960, the GDP nearly tripled, boosted by a strong manufacturing sector.²¹ Many American Baby Boomers (the generation born between 1946 and 1964) enjoyed unprecedented professional opportunities; in historian James Patterson's words, they entertained "grand expectations" for the future.²² Building upon the assumption of affluence, starting in the 1950s, concern for psychological well-being and self-actualization began to reshape American culture, laying the foundations for the

¹⁹ Peter Clecak, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

²⁰ Robert Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); see also, "Symposium on the 20th Anniversary of Habits of the Heart," *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2017): 179-213.

²¹ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 112, 139.

²² James Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-74* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

“permissive society” of the 1960s.²³ The “therapeutic turn” and “expressive revolution” continued apace after established social, political, and religious authorities faltered.²⁴

Robert V. Daniels and Bruce Schulmann unpack the significance of socio-economic transformations after 1970.²⁵ Decades of economic growth culminated in the early 1970s with trade imbalance, the Arab oil embargo, and stagflation. Compounding this, the postindustrial marketplace eroded the expectation of remaining in a single career or place for a lifetime. Daniels, Schulmann, and Philip Jenkins highlight the immense significance of gender-role reversals not only to the new economy but to the nation’s very social fabric. Jenkins contends that the “single most important vehicle for new values was feminism,” the movement aided by federal legislation institutionalizing equal opportunity and reproductive choice. While 43% of working-age women were paid employees in 1970, that number rose to 60% by the early 1990s.²⁶ Starting in 1979, women outnumbered men on the American university campus.²⁷ The boom in self-help literature, as analyzed by Micki McGee and Sandra Dolby, owed partly to the increasingly competitive, volatile marketplace.²⁸

The postwar era transformed American religion, as well. According to Princeton University sociologist Robert Wuthnow, society witnessed the recession of the “sacred canopy” described by Peter Berger. Whereas Americans once inhabited a vaguely religious

²³ Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-65* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁴ Philipp Rieff, *The Therapeutic Turn: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. See also Bryan S. Turner, “Talcott Parsons and the Expressive Revolution,” in *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71-83.

²⁵ Robert V. Daniels, *The Fourth Revolution: Transformations in American Society from the Sixties to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Bruce Schulmann, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).

²⁶ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 28-30.

²⁷ Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Higher Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

²⁸ Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Sandra K. Dolby, *Self-Help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

society, after 1960 individuals sought unique, privatized forms of religion within a secular cosmos.²⁹ The end of a shared public theism coincided with the collapse of consensus on America's role in the world. Robert Ellwood points to the 1960 *Life* magazine series, "The National Purpose"—published by Henry Luce, son of missionaries—as a kind of elegy to American exceptionalism.³⁰ Prompted by the decade's anti-establishment sentiments, individualistic "spirituality" began to supplant traditional "religion," as Ellwood, Wuthnow, and sociologist Wade Clark Roof agree.³¹ In his study of Baby Boomer religion, Roof found that a majority believed that one should formulate religious convictions outside of the institutional church. Such "seekers" tended to be "bricoleurs," combining various bits of doctrine and practice while on their lifelong, spiritual quests, the image used to capture the Boomer generation's religion.³² In Roof's interpretation, "the culture of choice and expressive individualism is deeply ingrained in all realms of contemporary life and affects how people think about moral and religious matters, even the discerning of divine will."³³ After "the nature of freedom itself was contested and redefined" in the 1960s, Wuthnow contends, evangelicalism provided "moral certainty" that was "almost self-legitimizing." Consequently, the typical born-again believer approached decisions "with the feeling that he is probably doing God's will."³⁴

²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

³⁰ Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 232-33.

³¹ Idem, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

³² Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Idem, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 137, 194-200.

³³ Idem, *A Generation of Seekers*, 94.

³⁴ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 83.

In the early 1980s, sociologist James Davison Hunter published research demonstrating that evangelicals looked more like their non-devout neighbors than portrayed by mainstream pundits. First, through thematic analysis of then-recent titles released by the most popular evangelical publishers, he heralded the rise of a “new evangelical theodicy” which emphasized the gospel’s ability to alleviate psychological ills rather than to save one from sin.³⁵ A few years later, he presented the results of extensive surveys and interviews of students at evangelical colleges to contend that they were in the process of “cognitive bargaining” with lifestyle influences considered “worldly” by their fundamentalist predecessors. The goals and worldviews of Hunter’s evangelical subjects, ostensibly representing the coalition’s future leaders, seemed to have eschewed fundamentalism’s “inner-worldly,” “vocational asceticism”—like that of Max Weber’s archetypal Puritans—for personal fulfillment and mainstream credibility.³⁶ Hunter has concluded that the “self,” renounced by previous generations, was now explored and developed.

Hunter’s work on American evangelicalism influenced Roof and other scholars. Jeffrey Swanson, for example, cited it to explain why the younger missionaries to Ecuador he studied cared more about attaining professional status than their older colleagues and resisted the image of missionaries as sacrificial heroes.³⁷ Conservative evangelical theologian David Wells also marshalled Hunter’s studies in multiple jeremiads about the movement’s loss of virtue and sound doctrine to consumerism and psychology.³⁸ According to Wells, evangelicals have embraced New Age, postmodern “mysticism” promising direct access to

³⁵ James D. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983); Idem., “Subjectivization and the New Evangelical Theodicy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 20, iss. 1 (1982):39-47.

³⁶ Idem, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ch. 3, esp. 50-53.

³⁷ Jeffrey Swanson, *Echoes of the Call: Identity and Ideology among American Missionaries in Ecuador* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 167-68.

³⁸ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 187-90; Ibid, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 110, 175-76.

the divine. Consequently, “personal intuition about the purposes of God, how his will is being realized in one’s personal life, tends to blur into [biblical] revelation and become indistinguishable from it.”³⁹

Contribution to Scholarship

This is the first study to delineate the contours of PLP; to identify it as a significant component of evangelicalism; and to trace its origins, spread, and engagement with contemporary culture. Whereas historians sometimes dismiss such popular piety and language as meaningless platitudes, this study argues that appeals to “God’s plan” express convictions that have driven a substantial bloc of American Christians. The attempt to map the intellectual-theological genealogy of PLP from key leaders and institutions in twentieth-century American fundamentalism and evangelicalism is original. As a result, compared to recent scholarship on evangelicalism, this study recognizes the seminal role women have played in shaping the entire movement’s thought, not simply women’s groups or social characteristics.

Additionally, this thesis contributes to the growing body of historical scholarship documenting evangelicalism’s accommodation to—and appropriation of—mainstream trends and techniques.⁴⁰ PLP is a means for tracing cultural adaptation as it occurred from the 1940s to the early 1980s. Yet the narrative also shows that evangelicals remained

³⁹ Idem., *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 45-46.

⁴⁰ Representative works include Axel Schafer, ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Candy Gunther Brown and Mark Silk, eds., *The Future of Evangelicalism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); David Hempton and Hugh McLeod, eds., *Secularization in the North Atlantic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Todd Brenneman, *Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Larry Eskridge and Mark Noll, *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000); David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith: Explorations in American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994). See also Marsden, “Fundamentalism: Yesterday and Today (2005),” in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 253-55.

spiritually minded, as they approached everyday life under the shadow of divine guidance. Thus, the thesis brings balance to a field dominated by the conservative-liberal paradigm, filling in gaps in major recent histories. Molly Worthen's *Apostles of Reason* argues that continual crises of ideological authority underscored the postwar coalition, as leaders of varying denominations and commitments fought over biblical inerrancy, eschatology, the charismatic movement, missions, and American politics.⁴¹ Matthew Sutton's *American Apocalypse* portrays twentieth-century evangelicals as "apocalypticists," who derived their identity, mission, and political activism from end-times expectancy.⁴² As Worthen and Sutton focus on institutional elites, their analyses neglect what was driving evangelicalism's most culturally engaged and influential members, youth. Stephen Miller's *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years*, also concerned with political engagement, portrays the late 1970s through the 1990s as an era when evangelicalism was less of a cohesive movement than a mood and language sweeping the nation.⁴³ Appeals to "God's plan for your life" surely constituted one stream of this pervasive evangelicalism.

Beyond politics, the "business" turn in American religious historiography has demonstrated the importance of capitalism and Christian businessmen to twentieth-century evangelicalism. In fostering the individual's talents and interests, PLP and free-market ideology are closely connected.⁴⁴ Another fertile area is the history of missions and

⁴¹ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴² Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴³ Steven Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁴ Major volumes include Amanda Porterfield, Darren Grem, and John Corrigan, eds., *The Business Turn in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jan Stievmann, Philip Gogg, and Detlef Junker, eds., *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Grem, *The Blessings of Business: Corporate America and the Rise of Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Sarah Hammond, *God's Businessmen: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War*, ed. Darren Dochuk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure:*

transnational evangelical networks, specifically the following issues: How changes in the missionary movement changed assumptions of missionary calling; how the impulse to global mission or humanitarian work has molded evangelical identity; and, finally, how transnational parachurch organizations have spread PLP language and literature.⁴⁵

Defining Evangelicalism

Defining “evangelical” and identifying “evangelicals” is notoriously difficult, and the task has only gotten more complicated since 2016, when many self-identified American evangelicals renounced the label due to its negative political connotations. This thesis will not attempt to delineate theological boundaries for evangelical identity but will rely upon standard historical definitions of the movement, starting with David Bebbington’s well-known quadrilateral. Emerging in the eighteenth-century, transatlantic revivals led by English divines John Wesley and George Whitefield and New England Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards, modern evangelicalism and evangelicals were recognizable by fourfold emphases on the Bible as the ultimate source of theological authority (“biblicism”), Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross (“crucicentrism”), the experience of repentance and faith (“conversionism”), and the importance of witnessing to this faith in word and deed (“activism”).⁴⁶ Out of the vast, global network arising from these revivals, this thesis focuses on the more irenic heirs to the 1920s-30s Fundamentalist movement in the northern United States, known as neo-evangelicals in the late 1940s and simply as “evangelicals” after 1960. Marsden’s shorthand definition for a postwar evangelical as one who identified with Billy

The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

⁴⁵ Melanie McAllister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Heather Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Sarah Ruble, *The Gospel of Freedom and Power: Protestant Missionaries in American Culture after World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 2-17.

Graham will be followed here.⁴⁷ Although Graham technically was ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention, that network was largely isolated from intra-denominational neo-evangelicalism until circa 1980, and thus it will not be covered here.⁴⁸ While some may object that this makes the study too narrow, the author contends that analyzing the trajectory of one, cohesive movement over time is valuable. Moreover, neo-evangelicals exhibited features integral to the questions asked here. First, the coalition united Calvinist, Arminian, and Pentecostal traditions, which technically held differing *doctrinal* views of how God governed the world and individuals. Second, the missionary movement was key to neo-evangelical identity. Third, unlike their separatist, militant brethren—fundamentalists—neo-evangelicals conscientiously engaged with modern, secular culture.

Method and Sources

This thesis is a work of intellectual and cultural history. The methodological approach employed is a close textual analysis of lay-level literature. Key words and themes—the missionary call, self-denial, self-fulfillment, desires, happiness, surrender, for example; specific Bible verses and translations; and explicit references to social context. Out of all groups within neo-evangelicalism, youth were at the forefront of cultural change, and PLP texts primarily targeted young adults anxious about their futures. Thus, three national student ministries with close ties to Graham and neo-evangelicalism, namely InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Youth for Christ, and Campus Crusade for Christ, anchor my analysis. Texts produced within these youth networks—magazines, conference anthologies and ephemera, in-house training manuals, devotional literature, and missionary propaganda—from circa 1940 to 1985 constitute the bulk of primary sources. Included, as well, are writings by evangelical leaders and educational institutions influencing these movements, the latter including Fuller Seminary, Wheaton College, Moody Bible Institute, and Dallas

⁴⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235.

⁴⁸ David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1993).

Theological Seminary. Thus, the geographical centers of my subjects are Chicago and Los Angeles, with some influences from Dallas, Texas and Washington, D.C. Outside of the parachurch student ministries, talk of God's plan for the individual's life may emanate from pulpits but more typically is the currency of popular media that the average believer imbibes and incorporates into their everyday parlance, including periodicals, Sunday School curriculum, and mass-market books on discerning God's will. Sales figures and reviews of the mass-market books are few and far between due in part to the closure of some publishing houses or their sale to massive, non-researcher-friendly conglomerates. As this has made gauging some books' significance at the time difficult, my analysis takes into consideration the authors' credentials, the publishing houses' significance to the neo-evangelical coalition, number of reprints of the book, and the number of libraries currently holding copies.

In addition to published texts, much of the primary-source material comes from archives, especially the Special Collections and Archives of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Collections mined include the records of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), particularly the planning records from the ministry's triennial student-missions conferences, and various materials from the Youth for Christ, the Fellowship Foundation, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association collections. The Henrietta Mears papers and archives of Gospel Light Publishing, held in Pasadena, CA at the time of research (2014); the Campus Crusade Archives in Orlando, FL; the Student Volunteer Movement papers at Yale Divinity School Archives; and the Richard Halverson Papers at Princeton Theological Seminary were also consulted. As for challenges with archival sources, some collections are richer than others, and nearly all the records from the organizations' early days (1940s) are sporadic in their coverage.

Structure of thesis

The thesis is structured chronologically, thematically, and institutionally. Demonstrating that PLP was neither completely new nor uniquely American, Chapter One

traces its development from early modern Protestantism through to interwar fundamentalism, focusing on its direct origins in the transatlantic Keswick movement and the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in the late nineteenth century. The call to “surrender” one’s will to God’s and to evangelize the world powerfully shaped American fundamentalism and PLP into the 1930s. Chapter Two begins the analysis of PLP’s dissemination throughout Chicago-centered evangelical student-parachurch organizations in the 1940s. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Youth for Christ conflated PLP with personal holiness and, after the war, a resurgent foreign-missionary movement, as displayed particularly in the texts of IVCF’s Urbana conferences. Chapter Three analyzes the ministry and Sunday School curriculum of Henrietta Mears (1890-1963), Christian Education Director of First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California. Chapter Four identifies the emergence of what is termed the “gospel of God’s plan” from Mears’s protégés, specifically Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright (1921-2003), Presbyterian minister Richard Halverson (1916-1995), and evangelist Billy Graham (1918-2018). Epitomized by the phrase, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” the first of Bright’s Four Spiritual Laws, this gospel resonated with the religious revival, anti-Communist rhetoric, and humanistic psychology pervading American culture from 1947 to 1965. Chapter Five argues that the 1960s enervated PLP’s evocation of missionary sacrifice in the Chicago-centered ministries. YFC encouraged teenagers to pursue culturally influential professions rather than traditional evangelism, while IVCF promulgated inconsistent teaching on discerning a foreign-missionary call in revolutionary times. Finally, Chapter Six assesses PLP’s reflection of the cultural shift toward self-fulfillment after 1970, as seen in evangelical teaching on women’s roles, career choice, and missionary service, and as reflected in mass-market PLP manuals conflating God’s will with personal desire and fulfillment.

Chapter One: Personalized Life Providence: Precedents and Origins

Locating the origins of a popular American-evangelical discourse is as complicated as determining the origins, content, and boundaries of American evangelicalism itself. Historian George Marsden's short-hand definition of a post-World War II "evangelical" as anyone who identified favorably with celebrity revivalist Billy Graham provides a starting point.¹ The evangelical network Graham represented could trace their lineage to earlier twentieth-century movements and leaders centered in the Northeastern United States, Chicago, and Southern California, themselves the heirs of previous transatlantic revivalism. The appeals to "God's plan for your life" reverberating throughout postwar evangelicalism also were no postwar novelty. Instead, Personalized Life Providence (PLP) originated from the confluence of several streams of Protestant thought and practice related to three main theological ideas. The first is divine providence, the belief that God in his sovereignty governs and sustains creation and humanity. The second is vocation or calling, terms used here to denote God's calling the individual Christian to eternal salvation and temporal duty.² The final component is discernment, the task of ascertaining how God is directing either history or the individual's life course. Attempting to pinpoint the exact sources and trace the full development of PLP is well beyond the scope of this thesis. This account, however, will argue that early modern Protestantism set theological precedents for subsequent understandings of providence, vocation, and discernment that nineteenth-century evangelical networks, influenced by their religious and cultural milieu, fashioned into PLP.³

¹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235.

² William Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 1.

³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 2-17; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004); and Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1. Whether evangelicalism, as a

Precedents from the Reformation to 1850

PLP is a discourse directed to individual Christians contemplating their own lives. Its most direct ancestor is vocation, deriving from the Latin phrase, *vocare*, “to call.” In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Protestant reformer John Calvin taught the individual’s “special” or “effectual” call to saving faith would be connected with daily work.⁴ Before Calvin, Martin Luther subverted the idea that priests and monks were necessarily more spiritual than the farmer in the fields, the wife tending to children, the cobbler making shoes. All such vocations, he affirmed, could glorify God. Yet vocation may be understood as more than the sum of its parts, the call to faith and the call to a kind of work. English Puritan theologian William Perkins provided a helpful, early depiction of vocation in his 1595 *Treatise on the Callings or Vocations of Men*, writing, “A vocation or calling is a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God, for the common good.”⁵ In addition to the general calling to be a “child of God” and “heir to the kingdom of heaven,” Perkins maintained that “every person, of every degree, state, sex, or condition without exception, must have some personal and particular calling to walk in.”⁶ In his vision, the individual fulfilled a role in God’s divine plan for the social order that was relatively static and reinforced social hierarchies and cohesion.⁷ Yet Christians were to be “content” even in lowly callings—such as housekeeping or tending sheep—as their “particular” calling “must be practiced in and with the general calling.” The indissoluble link between the two callings underscored his admonition, “And if you would have signs and tokens of your election and salvation, you must fetch them from the constant practice of your two callings jointly

movement, should be traced to the German “evangelicals” who followed Protestant Reformer Martin Luther after 1517 is debatable but foundational evangelical doctrines originated in the Reformation.

⁴ Placher, *Callings*, 232-39.

⁵ William Perkins, “A Treatise of the Vocations,” in *Callings*, ed. Placher, 264-65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷ Charles Constantin, “The Puritan Ethic and the Dignity of Labor: Hierarchy vs. Equality,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1979): 546.

together.”⁸ Although Max Weber’s infamous portrayal of the Puritans as individuals constantly obsessing over their election have overstated the reality, the relationship between one’s general calling—eternal salvation—and his particular calling—life work—is an important angle to consider when analyzing later, distinctly evangelical understandings of the particular calling.⁹ This is especially the case after the terms, “calling” and “vocation,” shed their spiritual significance in secularized, post-Enlightenment, mainstream society.¹⁰ By the late nineteenth century, when PLP’s first became identifiable as a pattern of theological ideas, evangelicalism exhibited acceptance of the “sacred” and “secular” societal divide and tended to associate certain vocations with one or the other spheres.¹¹

In PLP, the individual vocation is couched within a framework of divine providence, another theological emphasis in early modern Protestantism. The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, adopted in part or full by Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, and later Congregationalists and Baptists, codified Reformation theology, including much of the material in John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, completed nearly a century prior. Understanding PLP cannot be understood without reference to the Confession’s fifth section, “Of Providence.”¹² The first clause read:

God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct,
dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from
the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy

⁸ Perkins, “Treatise of the Vocations,” 267.

⁹ In his 1904-05 landmark study, sociologist Max Weber proposed that the predestinarian view of eternal “calling” prompted anxious Puritans to look for signs of their election in their business successes. See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

¹⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-22. Weber discussed the secularization of vocation through reference to Benjamin Franklin, who considered success in one’s “calling” an inherent good without any reference to spiritual significance.

¹¹ James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: SPCK, 1991), 13; William Law, *Serious Call to the Devout and Holy Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1961 [1724]), 200; and Constantin, “The Puritan Ethic,” 555.

¹² David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2005), 194-95. Through the 1648 Cambridge Platform, New England Congregationalists adapted the Westminster Confession to their colonial political context while retaining the core doctrinal content.

providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.¹³

God's "ordinary providence" thus referred to his rule over creation and his direct causation or use of indirect, or secondary, means to cause all events. Of the succeeding explanatory clauses, the seventh and final clause bears much significance to PLP, speaking directly to God's sovereign rule over Christians, as follows: "As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of His Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof." In others words, God providentially guided believers toward their sanctification.¹⁴

While Protestant orthodoxy informed evangelical theology, evangelical emphases developed during a series of transatlantic religious revivals beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. The revivals' participants and most visible leaders, English Anglicans John Wesley and George Whitefield, and American Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards, emphasized the centrality of the Bible, the atonement, the necessity of a conversion experience, and the importance of acting upon one's convictions through evangelism, missions, and social engagement.¹⁵ Another signature characteristic of evangelicalism was its role in bringing together Calvinist denominations such as Congregationalists and Presbyterians and Arminian groups like the Methodists.¹⁶ Although Wesley's followers, the Methodists, rejected Calvinistic predestination in matters of soteriology, they still affirmed God's direction of the world and his special care of Christians. Wesley himself depicted God's providence in terms of three, concentric circles. God watched over creation and non-Christians, who formed the

¹³ "The Westminster Confession," in *Creeds of the Church: A Reader in Christian Doctrine, From the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Nashville, TN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 200.

¹⁴ Ibid, 201.

¹⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-17.

¹⁶ See, for example, Donald Dayton, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

outside circle, but tended more diligently to the visible church comprising the second circle. The regenerated members of the true, invisible church inhabited the innermost circle and thus received God's closest attention and highest blessings.¹⁷ A distinct ecclesiology, wherein the "innermost circle" of true saints could more easily be identified, separated Wesley's portrayal of providence from the Westminster Divines', rather than a diminished view of God's sovereign direction of events.

While it is difficult to delineate a single, pan-evangelical view of providence held in 1800, all nuanced positions shared a common challenger in the Enlightenment, which eroded confidence in a personal deity ruling world affairs. This occurred, at first, through the concept's redefinition rather than its wholesale rejection. In the words of philosopher Charles Taylor, "Providence was understood in general terms; it was reflected in the regular disposition of things." The concept was anthropomorphized, as modern society came to be seen as the fulfillment of God's ultimate plan to govern the world through rationality. Taylor continues, "The Deists had no more place for the 'particular providences,' God's interventions in the stories of individuals and nations, which were at the center of much popular piety and were extremely important to the orthodox."¹⁸ Despite the polemical defenses of the doctrine by theologians such as Jonathan Edwards, by the century's end many political and intellectual elites, notably America's Founding Fathers, verbally assented to a general "Providence" but intended something distinctly less supernatural.¹⁹ In contrast, most Christian theologians of the young Republic retained the traditional view.²⁰ Spiritual

¹⁷ John Wesley, "Spiritual Worship," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 435. Wesley preached this sermon in 1780.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 272; Ibid., "Providential Deism," in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 263.

¹⁹ See Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁰ Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 241.

autobiography, personal diaries, and correspondence written by evangelical laity—those representatives of “popular piety”—expressed humble acceptance of divine sovereignty and approached particular providences as conveying either God’s judgment or His grace.²¹

The concepts of providence and vocation are more easily defined and located historically than PLP’s third component, discernment, a more varied spiritual practice interwoven throughout the two-thousand-year history of Christianity. The type of discernment integral to PLP is that of determining the life-course that God has planned for the individual believer and, therefore, is leading him or her to pursue. Early modern Protestants and later evangelicals held, to varying extents, that God guided the individual believer through the Scriptures, when read through the Holy Spirit’s illumination. While drawing comprehensive comparisons between the two traditions is not possible here, post-Enlightenment evangelicalism exuded markedly more individualism than early modern Puritanism, where the covenant community ostensibly exerted more authority over the individual’s decision-making process.²² Of course, prior to the late nineteenth century, an individual possessed far fewer career or marriage options, so the task of discernment naturally entailed more reference to one’s social context. Social realities aside, a distinctly religious development wrought by the Great Awakening boosted the individual’s assurance that he or she could ascertain salvific knowledge of God apart from the church. This

²¹ Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborne’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Idem, “Writing as a Protestant Practice: Devotional Diaries in Early New England,” in *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965*, ed. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 19-48. For the importance of interpreting particular providences in early modern Puritanism, see especially Michael Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10-15.

²² Barbara S. Donagan, “Godly Choice: Puritan Decision-Making in 17th-Century England,” *Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1983): 319-20; and Richard Sibbes, “Soul’s Conflict,” quoted in Donagan, 327-28. According to John Coffey, “Puritan Legacies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 337, Sibbes’ works were frequently republished and read by later evangelicals.

development, the conversion experience, would become one of the four recognized hallmarks of modern evangelicalism.

Nevertheless, as the eighteenth century closed, the evangelical attempt to discern God's specific leadings—rather than merely saving grace--retained reverence for the essential mystery of His will. This resignation underlay the influential hymn, “God works in a mysterious way,” the origin of the contemporary aphorism. In 1772, shortly before battling a depressive episode, English poet William Cowper wrote:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face. (V. 2)

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain. (V. 5)²³

The text was published on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1779 *Olney Hymns*, which contained Cowper's and his colleague John Newton's works and typified evangelical theology into the nineteenth century. Even in the preface, Newton attributed the collection's delayed publication to the “wise, though mysterious, providence of God” that allowed Cowper's illness.²⁴ One century later, influential evangelical leaders tended to assume that the individual scanning God's work did not do so “in vain.”

Evangelical PLP after 1850: Individualism, Baconian Empiricism, Romanticism

As Mark Noll contends in *America's God*, by the antebellum era American theologians were “less likely to stand in awe of God's mysterious powers and more likely to assume that they could know and adapt themselves clearly, simply, and directly to the ways

²³ Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll, ed., *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 220-21.

²⁴ Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 70.

of God.”²⁵ This newfound epistemological confidence coincided with what Nathan Hatch has described as the “democratization” of American Christianity that occurred during the Second Great Awakening when populist, proliferating Baptists and Methodists revolted against ecclesiastical authority, championing “no creed but the Bible.”²⁶ Theologically, the caricatured Calvinistic picture of God as all-controlling absolute faded as confidence in free will rose. A brief look at the era’s major Baptist doctrinal confessions attests to the consequences to providential belief. The hegemonic 1742 Philadelphia Confession had affirmed God’s complete rule over creation in a section, “Of Divine Providence,” mirroring the Westminster Confession of Faith. The 1833 New Hampshire Confession addressed providence only in the section, “Perseverance of the Saints,” in a clause stating, “a special Providence watches over [the Saints’] welfare.”²⁷ While this phrase also derived from the Westminster Confession, it belonged to the section expounding God’s sovereignty over all of creation, not simply the creatures who worshipped Him. The 1833 confession eventually was adopted by a large swath of Baptists in the North and Mid-West and also influenced the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) after it formed in 1845. Professors at the SBC’s flagship seminary were required to sign a brief, somewhat ambiguous statement upholding both God’s total sovereignty and human agency.²⁸ Viewed in tandem, the confessions demonstrate that by the Civil War, certain sectors of evangelicalism were articulating providence less precisely and more anthropocentrically.

²⁵ Noll, *America’s God*, 241.

²⁶ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 81.

²⁷ “The New Hampshire Confession,” in *Creeds of the Church: A Reader in Christian Doctrine, From the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Nashville, TN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 337.

²⁸ Bill J. Leonard, “Southern Baptist Confessions: Dogmatic Ambiguity,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 166-67.

PLP's emergence in the latter nineteenth century may be explained less by doctrinal innovations and more by a cultural mood spreading individualism, optimism, and—crucially—romanticism throughout the young republic. Bebbington recently has argued that the Romantic literary mood's "permeation" of modern evangelicalism has been underappreciated, as in the second half of the nineteenth century, evangelical theologians, preachers, and leaders drank deeply from the stream.²⁹ Congregationalist pastor and theologian Horace Bushnell, influenced by poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, epitomized the new Romantic idiom's flowering in Christian thought and language. Though situated within the "Connecticut river valley tradition" harking back to the Calvinist Edwards, the Yale-educated Bushnell has been deemed the "Father of Liberal Protestantism." Bushnell rejected evangelicals' revivalism, emphasis on original sin, and view of the atonement, and he introduced a "symbolic" interpretation of doctrine.³⁰ While his posthumous reputation may militate against his inclusion in the story of an evangelical discourse, he directly associated with and influenced revivalistic Protestant leaders, participating, for instance, in the New York City-centered Businessmen's Revival of 1857-1858.³¹ One such leader was Henry Clay Trumbull, editor of the widely respected *Sunday School Times*, who called Bushnell one of his "four religious teachers" who shaped him.³² Trumbull called Evangelicalism, at this time, provided a space for conservative and liberal tendencies for decades to come. Besides personal associations, Bushnell's preeminent place in the socially regnant American Protestant establishment would have lent his sermons and works broader cultural influence.

²⁹ Bebbington, *Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 150-51.

³⁰ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1930* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 124-47.

³¹ Bebbington, *Dominance*, 164. See also Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: From Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 175-85; Kathryn Long, *The Revival of 1857-1858: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 50.

³² Henry Clay Trumbull, *My Four Religious Teachers: Charles G. Finney, David Hawley, Elias R. Beadle, Horace Bushnell* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1903).

One of Bushnell's early sermons, "Every Man's Life a Plan of God," as one example, appears to have attained nationwide recognition, before and after its publication as the opening piece of the anthology, *Sermons for the New Life*, released by the influential New York house Charles Scribner and Company in summer 1858, in the revival's wake. The volume, possibly his most widely read, received a warm reception, even among conservatives.³³ It represents, at the very least, a striking precedent and possibly a direct source for twentieth-century PLP.

He effused:

There is, then, I conclude, a definite and proper end, or issue, for every man's existence; an end, which, to the heart of God, is the good intended for him, or for which he was intended; that which he is privileged to become, called to become, ought to become; that which God will assist him to become and which he cannot miss, save by his own fault. Every human soul has a complete and perfect plan, cherished for it in the heart of God—a divine biography marked out....³⁴

To discover this plan, one should study God's character, one's relationship to God, Scripture, and conscience. In addition, one should be an "observer of Providence; for God is showing you ever, by the way in which he leads you, whither he means to lead." Advising his congregants to consult with "friends," though not church leaders or family members, Bushnell maintained that the individual possessed the ultimate responsibility for ascertaining God's leadings:

Once more go to God himself, and ask for the calling of God; for, as certainly as he has a plan or calling for you, he will somehow guide you into it. And this is the proper office and work of his Spirit. By this private teaching he can show us, and will, into the very plan that is set for us. And this is the significance of what is prescribed as our duty, viz., living and walking in the Spirit; for the Spirit of God is a kind of universal presence, or inspiration, in the world's bosom; an unfailing inner

³³ Mary Bushnell Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 417. Edwin Doak Mead, "Horace Bushnell: The Citizen" (Boston: 1900), 2, notes an enthusiast who called it one of the three greatest sermons of all time.

³⁴ Horace Bushnell, "Every Man's Life a Plan of God," in *Sermons for the New Life* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1858), 6.

light, which if we accept and live in, we are guided thereby into a consenting choice, so that what God wills for us we also will for ourselves.³⁵

Bushnell affirmed the older idea of the particular or personal calling but, it appears, seems to have set a precedent for using the word interchangeably with “plan” and, moreover, for reconceiving calling’s objective. Whereas his Puritan forebears emphasized the calling’s importance to recognizing signs of grace, filling a role in the community, and progressing heavenward, Bushnell saw calling as the path toward achieving one’s “highest and best condition” while on earth. Further distinguishing him from sternly Calvinistic attitudes towards divine providence, he attributed enough power to free will to assert that one could, in fact, stymie God’s will. As the individual bore the responsibility to “accept and live in” the “unfailing inner light,” he or she could fail. The consequence, Bushnell warned, was falling from the perfect path onto a “less worthy” one. The sermon’s imagery and depiction of the Holy Spirit as a “universal presence, or inspiration, in the world’s bosom” signaled the concurrent theological shift from a transcendent God to an immanent Heavenly Father, who was knowable through mystical experience.³⁶ In sum, Bushnell imbued early PLP with the optimistic portrait of human potential, evoking the Romantic spirit of the age. An early Bushnell biographer described the sermon’s influence as follows:

“Every Man’s Life a Plan of God” — an early sermon — made an impression as deep and wide as any preached in the country, with two or three exceptions. Not many years ago the *New York Tribune* spoke of this sermon as one of the three greatest ever preached....Without containing a controversial word, it swept away the dismal thoughts engendered by a perverted doctrine of decrees, and brought God down into the lives of men in such a way as to make them feel that instead of being the objects of sovereign election, they were co-workers with God in his eternal plans.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 11.

³⁶ Bebbington, *Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 180. Later in the century, Romanticism prompted the gradual replacement of God’s “providence” with his “immanence” in liberal evangelicalism.

³⁷ Theodore T. Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1899), 55-56. See also Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 59-60.

The conviction that the individual Christian was a “co-worker” with God, who would “assist” him or her in finding the intended and therefore “best” life course, resonated with later evangelicals. Trumbull, in his tribute to Bushnell, twice noted his appreciation for “Every Man’s Life.”³⁸

Bushnell’s idealism was fairly common during the antebellum era, particularly among leaders of the Wesleyan/Holiness Movements that arose after the Second Great Awakening.³⁹ In Melvin Dieter’s interpretation, these revivalists amplified the universal call to salvation offered by Edwards and Wesley during the First Great Awakening by now offering to existing converts the opportunity to experience immediately a “higher,” “deeper” faith while on earth.⁴⁰ The year Bushnell’s *Sermons for the New Life* appeared, 1858, also witnessed the publication of *The Higher Christian Life* by Presbyterian pastor William Boardman and the birth of a movement promoting the “second blessing.”⁴¹ The Higher Life blessing was a post-conversion experience that empowered believers to stop sinning through the “surrendering” or “yielding” of one’s will to the Holy Spirit’s control, or “infilling.”⁴² Boardman preached in Britain and America and soon was joined by Robert Pearsall Smith and his wife, Hannah Whitall Smith, two proponents of the Wesleyan-rooted Holiness movement, which promulgated the *eradication* rather than *suppression* of the sinful nature. Whitall Smith’s 1875 text, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, became a devotional

³⁸ Trumbull, *My Four Religious Teachers*, 118, 126.

³⁹ Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 1-15; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1957), 103.

⁴⁰ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 16-17.

⁴¹ William E. Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life* (Boston, MA: Henry Hoyt, 1858).

⁴² Marsden, 74-80; Andrew Naselli, “Keswick Theology: A Survey and Analysis of the Doctrine of Sanctification in the Early Keswick Movement,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 13 (2008): 17-67.

classic, selling 175,000 copies by 1889 and warranting numerous successive editions.⁴³ The author unveiled the titular mystery by recounting the story of a friend who, having “abandoned her whole self to the Lord,” found her life “all sunshine in the gladness of belonging to Him.”⁴⁴ God was interested in the smallest details of life and thus would guide the surrendered Christian in making decisions. Close variations of her discernment method, a mélange of Quaker mysticism and practical sense, surfaced in later PLP manuals. She wrote, “There are four especial ways in which God speaks: by the voice of Scripture, the voice of the inward impressions of the Holy Spirit, the voice of our own higher judgment, and the voice of providential circumstances. Where these four harmonize, it is safe to say that God speaks.”⁴⁵ By “higher judgment,” as she explained, she meant “common-sense, enlightened by the Spirit of God,” in step with the Baconian empiricism from which nineteenth-century evangelical theology drew heavily.⁴⁶ The year *Secret of a Happy Life* was published, annual conferences on “practical holiness” began in the English Lake District town of Keswick. Attracting British and American speakers to the platform, the Keswick Convention (as it soon became known) helped foster a burgeoning, transatlantic network of speakers promoting revivalism and evangelism, anchored in many ways by Dwight L. Moody.⁴⁷

⁴³ Daniel Vaca, “Book People: Evangelical Publishing and the Making of Contemporary Evangelicalism” (Phd diss., Columbia University, 2012), 64.

⁴⁴ Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1888 [1875]), 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 72. For Baconian empiricism’s dominance in nineteenth-century theology, see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 256-91; and Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, 55-56. Marsden clarifies that “transcendental and romantic trends had by no means successfully replaced commitment to empirical scientific analysis” in the nineteenth century, adding, “Romantic and empiricist ideals were not mutually exclusive.” Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94-130.

⁴⁷ General histories of Keswick include John C. Pollock with Ian Randall, *The Keswick Story* (Philadelphia, PA: CLC Publications, 2006); Steven Barabas, *So Great a Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

As a famed Chicago-based preacher, travelling revivalist, and founder of the Bible Work Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society (renamed the Moody Bible Institute), Moody exerted a profound influence upon late nineteenth-century evangelicalism and twentieth-century American fundamentalism. Most significant to PLP was his 1880 establishment of summer conferences in Northfield, Massachusetts, featuring talks by many Higher Life proponents.⁴⁸ Though Moody's own ministry emphasis was evangelism, his 1881 book, *Secret Power: Or the Secret to Success in Christian Life and Work*, promulgated the central Higher Life teaching on the Holy Spirit's relationship to guidance. He asserted, "if we will yield ourselves up to be directed by the Spirit, and let Him lead us, He will guide us into all truth," adding that individuals, including himself, would have been "saved from a great many dark hours if we had only been willing to let the Spirit of God be our counsellor and guide."⁴⁹ His promise of "success in the Christian life"—reverberating with both Whittall Smith's and Bushnell's cheer—entailed holiness but also evangelistic power and emotional peace. Through Moody, the character of PLP reflected religious individualism, as well as rugged American individualism.⁵⁰

Yet PLP was not exclusively American, as is evidenced by one of Moody's protégés, Henry Drummond. Drummond, a Scottish Presbyterian speaker and science professor at the Glasgow Free Church College, aided Moody's 1883 revival campaign in Edinburgh and subsequently became one of the evangelist's protégés.⁵¹ In addition to speaking at Northfield, Drummond's work was published widely in the United States and was influential

⁴⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 35.

⁴⁹ Dwight L. Moody, *Secret Power: Or the Secret to Success in Christian Life and Work* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1881), 91.

⁵⁰ William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959), 253.

⁵¹ Mark Toone, "Evangelicalism in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of the Work and Theology of D.L. Moody and His Protégés, Henry Drummond and R.A. Torrey" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1988).

in evangelical circles.⁵² His 1883 *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*—an attempt to reconcile biblical truths with evolutionary science—employed Romantic imagery and even referenced Bushnell’s “Sermons for the New Life.” In a meditation on spiritual growth, Drummond interpreted Jesus’s parable about the lilies to mean that because “both man and flower, He planted deep in the Providence of God,” Christians could “live a free and natural life, a life which God will unfold for us, without our anxiety, as He unfolds the flower.”⁵³ In *The Ideal Life*, a posthumously published compilation of addresses, he contended that the most important objective in the Christian life, contrary to the most prevalent assumptions, was to “do God’s will,” in both the “universal” and “particular” senses. The former type had been revealed in the Bible but the latter was given exclusively to the “individual” believer, as it was the place where “each saint’s steps are ordered of the Lord.”⁵⁴ Including within this one’s “calling in life,” Drummond recovered classical Protestant language missing from his Higher Life contemporaries’ discernment manuals. Another, more contemporary term Drummond introduced was “career,” which he argued was “almost as important as his character in life.” Thus, “God may have a will for my career.”⁵⁵

Like Whitall Smith, Moody, Bushnell, Drummond touted the “secrecy” of God’s will—but a secret that could be unlocked. To Drummond this enjoined one to “enter into this private chamber of God’s will, and ask the private question, “Lord, what wouldest Thou have me do?”⁵⁶ Though vague about how one should discern God’s will, he unequivocally maintained, “It can be known by you.” On both sides of the Atlantic, evangelicals’

⁵² Thomas E. Corts and Marla Haas Corts, “Henry Drummond: From Scotland to America with Love,” in *Henry Drummond: A Perpetual Benediction*, ed. Thomas Corts (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 69-91.

⁵³ Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890 [1883]), 65.

⁵⁴ Idem., *The Ideal Life and Other Unpublished Addresses* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 132.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106.

traditional awe and reverence for the “mystery” of the divine will seem to have ebbed. Two additional British colleagues of Moody furthered this development, advocating discernment methods resembling Whitall Smith’s but exhibiting a heightened sense of epistemological certainty. *The Secret of Guidance* appeared in 1896, first published by Fleming H. Revell in New York City. Run by Moody’s stepbrother, this press was a leading distributor of evangelical devotional books from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. Author F.B. Meyer, an English Baptist minister and Keswick Convention mainstay, visited the United States nearly twenty times to speak at events such as Moody’s Northfield conferences.⁵⁷ In this work Meyer advocated a three-pronged discernment test, as follows: “God’s impressions within and His word without are always corroborated by His Providence around, and we should quietly wait until these three focus into one point.”⁵⁸ He elaborated, “The circumstances of our daily life are to us an infallible indication of God’s will, when they concur with the inward promptings of the Spirit and with the Word of God. So long as they are stationary, wait. When you must act, they will open.”⁵⁹ Exuding the Baconian spirit of the age, he portrayed discernment as a quintessentially individualistic discipline:

We have no need or right to run hither and thither to ask our friends what we ought to do; but there is no harm in our taking pains to gather all reliable information, on which the flame of holy thought and consecrated purpose may feed and grow strong. It is for us ultimately to decide as God shall teach us, but His voice may come to us through the voice of sanctified common-sense, acting on the materials we have collected.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ian M. Randall, “F. B. Meyer,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 429. See also W.Y. Fullerton, *F.B. Meyer: A Biography* (London, Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1930).

⁵⁸ F.B. Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 14.

⁵⁹ Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance*, 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

He concluded the discussion with his own testimony. Only after “months of waiting and prayer,” he had become “absolutely sure of the Guidance of my heavenly Father.”⁶¹ Another English holiness advocate and Meyer colleague, G. Campbell Morgan, who occupied the pulpit of London’s Westminster Chapel when not touring worldwide, taught in *The Perfect Will of God* (1901) that one could know the divine will through studying the Scriptures, “illumination by the Holy Spirit,” and “combination of circumstances in the divine government of God.”⁶² Thus, transatlantic PLP presumed that the individual, in insulation from the ecclesiastical or social community, possessed the mental ability and bore the responsibility to discern God’s particular will.

The Missionary Movement

Nineteenth-century PLP had grown increasingly demystified and individualized, as evangelicals were swept up in the epistemological currents. As the twentieth century approached, the discourse became anchored to the idea of “*doing* the will of God,” demonstrating the fourth of Bebbington’s characteristics of evangelicalism, activism. Moreover, overseas missionary service rose to the top of agenda for activism. Moody’s Northfield conferences contributed to this development by laying the groundwork for the Student Volunteer Movement’s (SVM) establishment after 1886, whose “watchword” rang, “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”⁶³ SVM leader Arthur Tappan Pierson issued a corporate call to pursue foreign missions, asking students to sign missionary pledge cards that stated, “I am willing and desirous, God permitting, to become a foreign missionary.” In a widely disseminated 1901 pamphlet, the SVM addressed the issue of discerning a divine call to the foreign mission field. Compiling essays from numerous

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Perfect Will of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 154-58.

⁶³ Dana L. Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 145-50; Marsden, 35; C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 24-27.

leaders, the opening, paradigmatic chapter came from the pen of Robert E. Speer, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Speer contended against popular notions that prospective missionaries should wait for a supernatural “call” to the field, arguing instead that the burden rested upon each Christian to show why he or she should *not* go.⁶⁴ As indicated, the piece originated from a formal response to the question of calling posed during a 1900 student conference in London.

As much as he insisted that missions should be given first consideration, a lesser known, 1901 Northfield speech suggested that he was still concerned that the individual should find the exact, specific place of service God had intended, whether foreign evangelism or not. In an address to the Student Conference, “To Every Man His Work,” he discussed finding one’s divinely ordained occupation. “God Himself,” he insisted, “has been far more anxious than I to guide me into just what precise place which He has made in this world me,” subsequently proclaiming, “Life is a wasted thing, life is missing its real purpose here in the world, *life is sin--which simply is missing its chief purpose--*until we have discovered for ourselves precisely what God’s work and will for us in this world may be” (emphasis added).⁶⁵ Fulfilling one’s intended earthly purpose was necessary not only to live righteously but, perhaps unsurprisingly, to live happily: “The only joy, as I conceive it, that any mind can find in his life, is perceiving in it some unfolding of God’s purpose” through “a particular piece of work set for him.”⁶⁶

Speer not only cited Bushnell’s advice on discernment but ostensibly presumed audience familiarity with the New England preacher’s corpus, cautioning students, “as

⁶⁴ Robert E. Speer, “What Essentially Constitutes a Missionary Call?” *The Call, Qualifications, and Preparation of Candidates for Foreign Missionary Service* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1901), 3-6. See also John F. Piper, Jr., “Robert E. Speer: His Call and the Missionary Impulse, 1890-1900,” in *American Presbyterians* 65, no. 2, 150 Years of Foreign Missions (Summer 1997): 102.

⁶⁵ Speer, “To Every Man His Work,” *Northfield Echoes* (1901), 180.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

Horace Bushnell points out in his great sermon, ‘Every Man’s Life a Plan of God,’” one must avoid three mistakes in discerning the plan. These included, first, focusing on a “singular” path of service; second, “copying another man’s life”; and, third, expecting to ascertain one’s entire life-plan at once. Nearly paraphrasing Bushnell, Speer outlined six steps in the discernment process beginning with considering the “character of God,” followed by one’s relationship to God, and then “moral conscience.” He listed in fourth place the “law of God as written in the Word of God,” deeming it “that one corrective of moral judgment.” After then soliciting friends’ advice, one should go “direct to God,” who guided through “providences.”⁶⁷

Regarding the “missionary enterprise,” Speer portrayed it as an exemplary, albeit not exclusive path of worthy Christian service, as “it sets before a man a specific definite divine work in this world to do and gives a man a chance to spend his life doing it.”⁶⁸ Despite stereotypical criticisms of missions, it was not “missionary martyrs” but those who sought long and comfortable existence, devoid of “great thrilling passion” and “divine visions overcoming and overpowering it,” who truly “wasted” their lives. In sum, the “calling” component of PLP became increasingly tied to a specific work—and there was a good chance it was missions.⁶⁹ Furthermore, while lauding personal sacrifice, Speer’s portrayal emphasized the excitement and adventure offered to those who sought and found God’s ideal plan.

For evangelicals, PLP became increasingly tied to faith missions. A major source for this was Briton George Müller’s 1837 autobiography, *The Narrative of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller*, which recounted his experience running an orphanage for girls in Bristol, England. The frequent financial struggles provided opportunities for him to exercise

⁶⁷ Ibid., 179-83.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 184.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 185-7.

faith that God would provide, his example inspiring numerous future evangelical leaders, including J. Hudson Taylor and A. T. Pierson, who applied the “faith principle” to the missionary movement. Taylor, a physician and missionary to China, pioneered a new model of supporting missions than the typical nineteenth-century program built on expansive denominational boards. In 1865, he founded the China Inland Mission on the faith principle, wherein missionaries supported themselves and their work through prayer and providential gifts rather than through board funding and control.⁷⁰ Taylor addressed the Northfield attendees in 1888, recruiting the first group of North American faith missionaries. In 1899, Pierson demonstrated his debt to faith spirituality by publishing a biography of *Müller of Bristol and his Witness to a Prayer-Hearing*.⁷¹ In the faith principle, God’s providence was, in a way, provisional, predicated upon meeting certain spiritual benchmarks. “Surrendering” the will, was necessary. Müller’s autobiography explained how he discerned God’s leading, beginning, “I seek to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in a given matter.”⁷²

Perhaps the best exemplar of PLP’s missionary spirituality was Andrew Murray, the Scottish Dutch-Reformed missionary to South Africa. Murray’s prolific, influential addresses and writings on the topic advanced a mystical, sometimes ascetic approach to knowing God through the Holy Spirit. Murray’s visit to the 1895 Northfield Convention gave his views a wide hearing, and his addresses were published into the volume, *The Masters Indwelling*. In his most memorable message, according to an insider history, he taught that Christians were divided into two camps, “the spiritual” and the “carnal.”⁷³ The

⁷⁰ Bebbington, *Dominance*, 189-90.

⁷¹ A.T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol and his Witness to a Prayer-Hearing God* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1899).

⁷² George Müller, *The Narrative of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller, written by himself* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1855).

⁷³ Walter Sloan, *These Sixty Years: The Story of the Keswick Convention* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1935), 43-44.

carnal Christian had not yet surrendered his sinful, rational will to God, thereby stymying the Holy Spirit's infilling and control over one's desires and behaviors. In a 1901 text, *Thy Will Be Done*, Murray reiterated Drummond's emphasis on Paul's post-conversion prayer, "Lord! What wilt Thou have *me* to do [emphasis original]?" and tied it to PLP, as follows:

That word was the beginning, the root, the strength, the mark of his whole wonderful life. His work was so blessed and fruitful, because he remained faithful to the one thing: he only lived for the will of his Lord. There are many lessons which these words suggest....The Lord has a will a life-plan for each of us, according to which He wishes us to live....To each of us the Lord will unfold this will or life-plan....He expects us to wait on Him for the discovery of His will both in that which is universal, for all his people, as in that which He wills for each one individually.⁷⁴

Surrendering one's will was not a mantra repeated throughout one's day but an attitude cultivated through devotional disciplines, specifically prayer. Murray's *Thy Will Be Done*, devotional classic *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, and numerous additional entries in his 200-plus volume corpus demonstrated this intense piety. Along with other missionary movement leaders, Murray advocated the "Morning Watch," an hour or more of pre-dawn prayer focusing on global evangelistic advancement, as well as on personal spiritual battle. Discerning God's will was paramount, too. As Murray described it in an 1898 description of the Morning Watch's proper observance, "We need to be still, to wait and hear what response God gives. This is the office of the Holy Spirit, to be the voice of God to us." This required the "quiet stillness that waits on God," as only "when God is waited on to take His part in our prayer that the confidence will come to us that we receive what we ask, that our surrender of ourselves in the sacrifice of obedience is accepted...." Predicating receipt of divine direction upon this sacrificial prayer, Murray continued, "therefore we can count upon the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the will of God, as He means us to know and do it."⁷⁵ While Murray included Bible reading within the Morning Watch, he cautioned the Christian

⁷⁴ Murray, *Thy Will Be Done* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1901), 51-52.

⁷⁵ Murray, "The Morning Watch in the Life of Obedience," in *The School of Obedience* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1898), n.p.

against allowing one's own scriptural knowledge to obfuscate the Holy Spirit's communication.⁷⁶ In subsequent decades, the focus on "quiet stillness" before God grew within evangelical circles, soon developing into the "Quiet Time," the standard prayer discipline used for private devotion and pursuit of divine guidance. Christian Missionary Alliance denominational founder A.B. Simpson may have set the precedent by teaching his circles that prayer was a two-way channel, involving as much listening to God speaking as speaking to Him. Though Murray's conception of prayer foreshadowed this, the Quiet Time demanded less attention to spiritual warfare and more to peaceful stillness than had the Morning Watch.⁷⁷

In addition to the missionary movement's objectives and spirituality, PLP shared one of its most important constituencies: university students. Yale professor Henry B. Wright's *The Will of God and a Man's Life Work* attested to the diffusion of PLP from the Northfield summer camps to mainstream campuses. As a Young Men's Christian Association leader and Northfield supporter, Wright shepherded numerous university students contemplating the future, and this compilation of his devotional studies on the topic was published in 1909.⁷⁸ The preface claimed that Wright and his wife "staked happiness, home, work, love and life on the conviction that God has a plan for every person and that plan can be discovered if one will search diligently."⁷⁹ The book's bibliography pointed to the emergence of a PLP canon, as Wright cited Bushnell's "Every Man's Life a Plan of God," Moody's *Secret Power*, Meyer's *Secret of Guidance*, and Drummond's *Ideal Life*. In his Preface,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gregory O. Johnson, "From Morning Watch to Quiet Time: The Historical and Theological Development of Private Prayer in Anglo-American Protestant Instruction, 1870-1950" (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2007), 80-96. This dissertation provides the only complete history of the Morning Watch and Quiet Time. See also Brian Stanley, "The Legacy of George Sherwood Eddy," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 2000), 128.

⁷⁸ Hopkins, *John R. Mott*, 222-23.

⁷⁹ George Stewart, "Henry B. Wright: An Appreciation," in *The Will of God and a Man's Life Work*, by Henry B. Wright (New York: The Young Men's Christian Association Press, 1924 [1909]), viii.

Wright critiqued what he saw as an overemphasis on Christian service in the perception of divine calling, lamenting that “among many college students” there existed an “erroneous impression that the doing of God's will is synonymous solely with the Clerical and Missionary careers” and excluded professions like law, business, and medicine, which were “distinguished as secular.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the ethos of sacrifice and duty propounded by Speer and the SVM remained palpable.

PLP and Fundamentalism: The Victorious Life

Assessing PLP as it developed after 1910 requires reference to the budding conservative-liberal theological rift in American Protestantism.⁸¹ When the World Missionary Conference convened at Edinburgh in 1910 to discuss the future of world missions, representatives from around the world, as well as from both Protestant wings, attended. Though missions were paramount to conservatives and liberals, they disputed the content of the gospel to be preached in foreign lands with increasing frequency. Conservative Protestants’ theological priorities at home and abroad were presented in *The Fundamentals*, a series of essay volumes published between 1910 and 1915 and financed by two California oilmen, brothers Lyman and Milton Stewart. Major points of orthodoxy presented in the volumes constituted the platform of those later known as the Fundamentalists. Yet the numerous essays comprising the *Fundamentals* contained not simply cold doctrine but warm-hearted, practical expositions on Christian spirituality and service. A major theme underlying the full series was supernatural intervention, which evangelicals defended against liberal suppositions denying God’s divine intervention in both biblical history and contemporary affairs, replacing providential intervention with immanence.⁸² A.T. Pierson

⁸⁰ Wright, preface to *The Will of God and a Man’s Life Work*, v.

⁸¹ See Geoffrey Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson, and Hammond* (Downers Grove, IL: 2017), esp. Parts I and II.

contributed three essays stressing this, “Proof of the Living God,” “The Foreign Mission Enterprise as Proof of the Superintending Providence of God” and “The Divine Efficacy of Prayer.”⁸³

The Yale-educated editor of *The Fundamentals*, R.A. Torrey, had succeeded Moody in Chicago before the Stewart brothers appointed him Dean of the new Bible Institute of Los Angeles (the Moody of the West) in 1912. His popular 1906 manual, *How to Succeed in the Christian Life*, reaffirmed the centrality of biblical authority to PLP in an era of both liberal theology and populist devotional practice. Read in faith, Scripture texts could guide one’s decision-making when God’s universally revealed, ethical will was interpreted in its proper context—and obeyed. Torrey cautioned believers that “any day that is allowed to pass without faithful Bible study is a day that is thrown open to...error or sin.”⁸⁴ In the final chapter, “Guidance,” he explicitly condemned the practice of opening the Bible at random, pointing one’s finger to a verse, and equating the message with divine communication. “Do not make a book of magic out of the Bible,” he sternly warned.⁸⁵ This folk practice, known as *Sortes biblicae*, appears to have resurfaced numerous times in church history, but particularly in Methodist piety.⁸⁶

Though associated with Fundamentalists, PLP typically did not reflect the militant fundamentalism borne out of the denominational controversy and infamous Scopes Trial.

⁸² Treloar, “The British Contribution to the Fundamentals,” in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom*, ed. David Bebbington and David Ceri Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17-18; Bebbington, *Dominance*, 181.

⁸³ R.A. Torrey et al, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1910-15).

⁸⁴ Torrey, *How to Succeed in the Christian Life* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1906), 48. See also David Gillett, *Trust and Obey: Explorations in Evangelical Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1993), 144-51.

⁸⁵ Torrey, *How to Succeed in the Christian Life*, 118, and Gillett, *Trust and Obey*, 146-47.

⁸⁶ Laura Bartlett, “Consulting the Oracle: *Sortes Biblicae* in Evangelicalism to 1900,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29:2 (Autumn 2011), 205-18. Bartlett highlights John Wesley’s frequent usage of this practice to determine sermon texts and to seek spiritual assurance.

Charles G. Trumbull, who contributed to *The Fundamentals* and was sometimes militant in approach, nevertheless boasted the genteel pedigree of the Protestant establishment once helmed by his late father and Bushnell supporter, Henry Clay Trumbull. Philip Howard, Henry's son-in-law and *Sunday School Times* successor, released a biography of him in 1905, with Charles contributing an introduction. Howard included numerous mentions of the patriarch's admiration for and friendship with Bushnell, as well as his sermon on divine calling. "Henry Clay Trumbull lived out the conviction that Bushnell crystallized in his sermon, 'Every Man's Life a Plan of God,'" Howard wrote. "That was a favorite theme of Mr. Trumbull's in thought and word, and the great fact therein embodied was the great life-chart from which he got his bearings."⁸⁷

The younger Trumbull's turn from more establishment Protestant emphases came after hearing an address at the 1910 Edinburgh conference, "The Spiritual Resources of the Christian." The speech gave him a new vision of the Christian life, where spiritual union with Christ should provide the individual believer with the ability to overcome sin and defeat and thus live in "victory," as Christ did. Having recently assumed the *Sunday School Times* editorship, Trumbull used the esteemed periodical and annual conferences to promote this post-conversion "blessing" and the power it purportedly gave the individual to enjoy inner peace, to win souls, and to stop willfully sinning.⁸⁸ He had help from his understudy, Robert C. McQuilkin, who would leave his own stamp on PLP after hearing Trumbull speak at missionary conference in New Wilmington, New Jersey, in August 1911. The 24-year-old University of Pennsylvania student, then pursuing a business career and Sunday School ministry, heard Trumbull extemporaneously recount his Edinburgh breakthrough. In a journal entry, McQuilkin recorded Trumbull's teaching that the path to victory required one

⁸⁷ Philip E. Howard, *The Life Story of Henry Clay Trumbull* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1905), 273.

⁸⁸ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26; Douglas W. Frank, *Less than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1986), 115-66.

to, first, “Surrender absolutely and unconditionally to Christ as Master of all that we are and all that we have, telling God that we are now ready to have His whole will done in our entire life, no matter what the cost.”⁸⁹ Secondly, one had to accept that God had set the believer free from sin through Christ. Trumbull’s testimony, including these two conditions, constituted the material of a *Sunday School Times* tract, “The Life that Wins.”⁹⁰ Desperately wanting to emulate Trumbull’s experience, McQuilkin sought additional prayer and personal counsel from him, resolving not to leave the room until confident that he had received the “experience” of victory. He surrendered all areas of his life—present sins and questionable habits, past failures, and his future “life plans.”⁹¹ That fall Trumbull asked him to edit two pieces for the weekly periodical, which to him seemed to be an indication of God’s plan for his life. Drawing upon his own experiences, a later *Times* editorial on discernment said that God guided by clearly opening doors rather than forcing the Christian to knock down closed ones.⁹² The *Sunday School Times*’s doors opened wide for him in February 1912, when he accepted a full-time editorial position and left the construction business permanently.

Together, Trumbull and McQuilkin launched the first Victorious Life Testimony conference in Oxford, Pennsylvania, in 1913. While surviving sources are limited, an anthology published by the *Sunday School Times* after the 1918 Victorious Life conference provides an overview of the movement’s founding intentions, key speakers, and major themes. In the introduction, the editors explained that the conferences served as venues for sharing individuals’ experiences of victory without systematizing a doctrinal theory of it. A concluding section compiled speakers’ testimonies, including McQuilkin, who described his own experience matter-of-factly: “When I found the Lord as my Victory, seven years ago, it

⁸⁹ Marguerite McQuilkin, *Always in Triumph: The Life of Robert C. McQuilkin* (Columbia, SC: Bible College Bookstore, 1956), 56-57.

⁹⁰ Charles G. Trumbull, “The Life that Wins” (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times, n.d.).

⁹¹ Marguerite McQuilkin, *Always in Triumph*, 55.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 57.

was as definite and clear-cut as a business proposition, without any special emotion.” After mentally surrendering all facets of his life—particularly his “future”—he affirmed God’s grace as sufficient, and then accepted the “wonderful, miraculous gift of victory and joy and peace.”⁹³ A list of books endorsed and sold by the conference committee revealed the sources of popular piety in World War I-era evangelicalism, including Andrew Murray, Hannah Whitall Smith, and George Müller.⁹⁴ Overall, the major addresses advanced the conviction that achieving victory over sin and spiritual empowerment necessitated surrendering one’s will, including future plans. As the truly victorious Christian was a conduit of divine action, one could expect to know the will of God for one’s life, because it was now synonymous with God’s perfect will. As Trumbull’s signature phrase, “Let go, and let God,” implied, the victorious Christian would fulfill God’s plan for his or her life automatically.⁹⁵ In a pamphlet, “Victory without Trying,” published by the *Sunday School Times* in 1923, Trumbull wrote, “if any of you dear people here are making life plans for yourself, you must stop it—if you want victory. It’s not your job. God made your life plans before the foundation of the world. He just wants you to yield yourself to Him, and He’ll take care of your life plans. Surrender completely and unconditionally, or you’ll never have victory.”⁹⁶

Douglas Frank has argued that the Victorious Life theology epitomized the sociological and religious milieu of modernity, when a “mind-cure” movement swept through early twentieth-century America.⁹⁷ In an age when evangelicals were losing cultural

⁹³ Robert C. McQuilkin, ed., “Personal Testimony,” in *Victory in Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times, 1918), 330.

⁹⁴ “Recommended books on the Victorious Life,” in *Victory in Christ*, ed. McQuilkin, back cover.

⁹⁵ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 339.

⁹⁶ Charles G. Trumbull, *Victory in Christ: Messages on the Victorious Life* (Philadelphia, PA: The Sunday School Times Company, 1959), 28.

⁹⁷ Frank, *Less than Conquerors*, passim.

capital, they could claim supernatural power through the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸ Instead of proffering a fundamentalist variety of positive thought, Victorious Life teachers stressed that deviating from God's plan was a grave error. One example was Lewis Sperry Chafer, who participated in numerous Victorious Life meetings and eventually carried the teaching to the American South.⁹⁹ In a 1918 text of practical theology, *He that is Spiritual*, Chafer delineated two types of Christians, "carnal" and "spiritual," codifying Murray's taxonomy.¹⁰⁰ Unlike the carnal Christian, only the spiritual Christian was possessed by the Holy Spirit and thus "experience[d] the divine purpose and plan in his daily life."¹⁰¹ Without using the Puritan language of "calling," he connected one's eternal election to one's temporal service. Citing Ephesians 2:10, he said, "The very service of the Christian, like his salvation, has been designed in the eternal plan and purpose of God." Therefore, "Undertaking any service other than that which was foreordained for the individual," he cautioned, could not be "called 'good works'" because it was "not the personal outworking of the will of God."¹⁰² Offering no specific discernment guidance, he simply said that only those who "walk in the Spirit" could discover their correct path of service.¹⁰³ The perfectionistic yet vague teaching was compounded by Chafer's sweeping definition of Christian service as one's full-time activity when not "resting," "playing," or being "infirm."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ John Fea, "Power from on High in an Age of Ecclesiastical Impotence: The 'Enduement of the Holy Spirit' in American Fundamentalist Thought, 1880-1936," *Fides et Historia* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 23-35.

⁹⁹ B. Dwain Waldrep, "Lewis Sperry Chafer and the Roots of Non-Denominational Fundamentalism in the South," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 4 (2007): 807-836.

¹⁰⁰ Naselli, "Keswick Theology: A Survey and Analysis," 27, 66.

¹⁰¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983 [1918]), 44.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 96-98.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

Confidence in the imminent Second Coming of Christ galvanized Chafer, as it had Victorious Life fundamentalism and the conservative wing of the late nineteenth-century missionary movement. Dispensational premillennialism, as taught by C.I. Scofield, prevailed after the 1909 publication of his eponymous, annotated reference Bible, which taught that world history was divided into dispensations, each characterized by a unique soteriological covenant.¹⁰⁵ For Chafer, personally mentored by Scofield, dispensationalism enjoined a more individualistic reading of the Bible for guidance. In the concluding chapter of *He That Is Spiritual*, he averred, “the Christian is primarily concerned with the exact purpose and plan of God for him” and “will not find the full revelation of the will of God for him in any portion of the Scriptures spoken to people of other ages.”¹⁰⁶ More generally, dispensationalism ensured that PLP would be inextricably linked to evangelical views of the future. Although dispensational premillennialism fostered a pessimistic outlook on secular society, the Victorious Life teaching and the missionary movement provided optimism that God was working out his purposes.¹⁰⁷ In 1924 Chafer founded Evangelical Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, the school later taking the name of its location and becoming a center of dispensational theology in twentieth-century America. Yet the school also produced countless Christian leaders who launched expansive, innovative ministries shaping postwar evangelicalism. Similarly, the dispensationalist Moody Bible Institute’s house organ, *Moody Monthly*, balanced its numerous prophecy articles during the tumultuous interwar period with rousing reports from the mission field.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 97-98.

¹⁰⁶ Chafer, 100.

¹⁰⁷ Marsden, 101.

¹⁰⁸ John Corrigan, “Moody Monthly,” in *Popular Religious Periodicals in the United States: Academic and Scholarly Journals*, ed. Charles H. Lippy (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 368-71.

Guidance and the Great Commission in the 1930s

Another important precedent for postwar PLP shared roots with the Victorious Life teaching but diverged in the 1930s: The Oxford Group. This university-student fellowship was organized informally when Frank Buchman, an American evangelist, presented a moving testimony to an Oxford University student house party in 1921. Buchman's followers officially adopted the Oxford Group name in 1931, and they subsequently shared with numerous campuses and churches in Britain and the United States his message of submission to one's "divine life-plan" revealed through divine impressions received during communal Quiet Times. Phillip Boobbyer traces the sources of Buchman's "divine life-plan" idea to Meyer, Wright, and Drummond.¹⁰⁹ Evangelical leaders withdrew their support for Buchman as the Group's guidance practices grew increasingly dependent upon subjective leading instead of scriptural teaching or reason. Once the Group's focus shifted to socio-political reform in the 1940s, its direct influence upon American evangelicalism ebbed. Nevertheless, according to Bebbington, Buchmanism was significant for what it portended: evangelicalism's encounter with and, in some circles, embrace of the twentieth century's ethos of anti-rational expressivism, a cultural seed which, he has argued, "fully flowered" in the 1960s.¹¹⁰

Another 1930s development influencing evangelical PLP was the "Four-Way Test," invented by Chicago industrialist and Methodist layman Herbert J. Taylor. In 1933, Taylor searched for a concise ethical code to guide his decisions as the new CEO of Club Aluminum, a failing company he hoped to save. As he recalled, "I leaned over my desk, rested my head in my hands and prayed. After a few moments, I looked up and reached for a white paper card. Then I wrote down the twenty-four words that had come to me: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be

¹⁰⁹ Philip Boobbyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 12-20.

¹¹⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 238.

beneficial to all concerned?”¹¹¹ Rotary, International, a businessman’s fraternal organization, promoted the test throughout the nation and world. Although it concerned single decisions rather than one’s full life-plan, it was significant to PLP for two reasons: First, Taylor’s test was the product of divine impressions resulting from prayer, although he was not connected to the Oxford Group. Second, his foundation underwrote numerous postwar evangelical youth ministries. Like many conservative Protestants in the 1930s, he had grown concerned about the mainline denominations’ declining zeal for evangelism and missions.¹¹²

McQuilkin happened to be one of those concerned. Like Pierson, he eagerly awaited Christ’s return and taught that individual Christians could hasten it through missionary work. In 1923 McQuilkin founded Columbia Bible College in South Carolina to be a center for missionary training, which he saw as sorely lacking. By then the SVM’s aims had shifted to the ecumenical movement and the Social Gospel, and missionary support and recruitment at conservative Christian colleges and Bible institutes had dwindled, as well. At the 1936 New Jersey Keswick convention, a group of students desiring to keep verbal proclamation of the gospel at the forefront consulted McQuilkin, whose recent call to “make Christ known” during a chapel service at Wheaton College in suburban Chicago had sparked a campus-wide revival of devotion and missions interest. The Student Foreign Mission Fellowship (SFMF), formed shortly after this meeting, would significantly shape postwar evangelicalism, as Chapter Two will argue.¹¹³

In the preliminary stages, McQuilkin hoped to merge with an existing organization, the League of Evangelical Students. However, the strictly Calvinistic LES leadership

¹¹¹ Herbert J. Taylor with Robert Walker, *God Has a Plan For You: The Inspiring First Person Account of Industrialist Herbert J. Taylor, originator of the famous Four-Way Test* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1968), 15.

¹¹² For more on Taylor, see Sarah Hammond, *God’s Businessmen: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War*, ed. Darren Dochuk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 57-84.

¹¹³ Hugo W. Norton, *To Stir the Church: A Brief History of the Student Foreign Missions Fellowships, 1936-1986* ([s.l.]: Student Foreign Missions Fellowship, 1986).

objected to his intent to use missionary pledge cards, as the SVM had used, objecting that one could not know with certainty what God was calling individual students to do.¹¹⁴

McQuilkin disagreed, as early SFMF literature demonstrated. A 1940 SFMF trifold brochure entitled “Facing the Missionary Call” seemed to have been inspired by the SVM’s widely disseminated 1901 pamphlet. Flipping over the cover, the tract read, in bold, all-capital letters, “God has a plan for me,” then proclaimed, “The first glorious fact for every young Christian to face with regard to his life work is that God has a plan for his life, and that he may know with certainty what that plan is.” God called the “unsaved man” to repentance followed by “yielding his life to Christ’s control,” as was well understood. “No less definite is God’s call to the Christian,” he averred, to be a “witness” and “to use his body, his time and his strength for the glory of God.”¹¹⁵

Moving beyond the general “call,” he tackled the quandary, “Finding God’s Plan,” as follows:

Not every Christian is called to give full time to Christian service. And not every Christian who gives full time is called to serve on the foreign mission field. But every young Christian should face the question whether he or she is called to full-time service. And every one who is thus called should seek God’s will concerning the foreign mission field.

McQuilkin’s stated motivation for considering the mission field echoed Speer. “The greatness of the need in heathen lands does constitute a call,” he maintained. He even reused one of Speer’s allusions to a renowned Scottish missionary to the Arab world: “the principle expressed by Ion Keith-Falconer is still in point: ‘While vast continents are shrouded in almost utter darkness and hundreds of millions suffer the horrors of heathenism or of Islam,

¹¹⁴ Keith Hunt and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 1940-1990 of the USA* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 103.

¹¹⁵ McQuilkin, “Facing the Missionary Call” (Student Foreign Mission Fellowship, ca. 1940), box 12 folder 23, Herbert J. Taylor Papers, BGCA.

the burden of proof lies upon you to show that the circumstances in which God has placed you were meant by Him to keep you out of the foreign mission field.”¹¹⁶

McQuilkin nevertheless qualified the bold, universal charge by emphasizing individuality, conceding that the need “does not prove that this or that individual Christian is to answer the call to go. The Lord will guide each life.” Elaborating further, “This does not mean that every Christian should plan to go to the foreign mission field unless the door is closed. God does not guide in a negative way, but in a positive way, in directing our lives.” Regardless of the specific location, McQuilkin portrayed each individual Christian’s purpose as being, at bottom, missionary. Like the SVM, the brochure concluded with a commitment statement but not a “pledge.” As the text explained, “The Student Foreign Missions Fellowship has expressed clearly the meaning of a purpose to go to the foreign mission field as over against a pledge to go....” Each member signed a statement affirming, “My Missionary Purpose.” Based on the knowledge of one’s own salvation, the unsaved person’s eternal punishment, the biblical Great Commission, and the need for workers, the student professed: “*believing* it to be God’s will for me, *I purpose* to be a foreign missionary, and will plan accordingly” (emphasis original). The statement continued:

Until He leads me to the field, I will support the work by my prayers and gifts and witnessing. If the Lord’s later leading should direct me into other service, I will seek to give Foreign Missions its rightful place of prominence in my ministry. This declaration of purpose recognizes the fact that the Lord may lead a Christian to make plans to go to the field, and later may hinder his going or lead him into other service. This is quite different from planning to go with the expectation of being hindered if it should not be God’s will.

The brochure was printed in 1940 with funding from Taylor’s Christian Workers Foundation, which he had established in 1939 to support a variety of new, youth-centered evangelical organizations, including Youth for Christ and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. On Falconer, see Gerald Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1999), 355-56.

Conclusion

The twentieth-century discourse surrounding the idea that God has a unique plan for each individual believer's life drew from precedents set in early modern Puritanism and Enlightenment-era evangelicalism. Until the mid-nineteenth century, developments within American evangelical Protestantism contributed to PLP's ascendancy more generally than specifically. In the face of Deism, belief in divine providence remained normative among evangelicals, although some Methodist and Baptist teachings contributed to an increasing focus upon God's providential care over believers at the expense of the cosmos, while the concept of vocation, meanwhile, was often narrowed to one's employment. Discernment practices balanced the merit of internal impressions and providential occurrences with communal wisdom. As Higher Life teaching spread after 1858, PLP became marked by individualism, pragmatism, and—where Bushnell's "Every Man's Life, a Plan of God" was influential—Romanticism. At the turn of the twentieth century, the student-missionary movement subsumed PLP, its legacy continued by premillennial, Victorious Life-style Fundamentalists in the 1930s. Thus, by the time neo-evangelicalism emerged from fundamentalism in the 1940s, PLP's ethos carried two potentially divergent impulses: to evangelize the world and to determine one's specific place in God's service.

Chapter Two: PLP and Missionary Self-Denial

In 1940, when the U.S. was on the cusp of war, American fundamentalism was on the verge of transformation. As Joel Carpenter has shown in *Revive Us Again*, Fundamentalism's publicly perceived defeat in the 1920s masked its underground reawakening.¹ During the 1930s and early 1940s, while mainline Protestants represented by the Federal Council of Churches maintained their hold on America's Christian establishment, fundamentalists spearheaded an array of new organizations, Bible schools, and evangelistic endeavors. Alongside defending the faith against modernism, protecting youth from worldliness and proclaiming the gospel were paramount objectives for these networks and prompted the launch of new parachurch organizations.² This chapter will explore PLP as it spread throughout Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Youth for Christ, student ministries based in Chicago with local branches throughout the nation's universities and public high schools, respectively.³ These organizations' ample magazines, conference addresses, devotional books, and tracts provide a consistent window through which to analyze PLP's evolving ethos, when situated within broader evangelical writing on the topic. As their young constituents encountered mainstream trends, IVCF and YFC contributed to the rise of a culturally engaged neo-evangelicalism out of the older fundamentalist networks.⁴ From the eve of World War II (circa 1940) through the early Cold War (circa

¹ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), is the best source on mid-century fundamentalism.

² Bruce Shelley, "The Rise of Evangelical Youth Movements," *Fides et Historia* 18 (January 1986): 47-63.

³ The main historical sources are Keith and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, 1940-90* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); James Hefley, *God Goes to High School* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970). Carpenter, ed. *The Youth for Christ Movement and Its Pioneers* (New York: Garland Press, 1991), is a compilation of several early insider histories.

⁴ On IVCF's and YFC's contribution to mid-century neo-evangelicalism, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 161-79, 207-09; Idem, "Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals," in *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*, ed. D.G. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 354-75.

1957), PLP's ethos was infused with self-denial for the sake of the gospel. God's calling to the individual was rooted in His plan to evangelize the world and sanctify believers. The discernment process followed from this, as finding God's plan or will necessitated submission. Yet PLP was also flexible, adaptable to the changing social, political, cultural, and religious milieu.

PLP and Fundamentalist Culture During World War II

In 1940-41, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship launched in the U.S. to unite Christian students on secular university campuses such as the University of Michigan, the location of the first American chapter. It was the latest heir to the British university ministry that emerged from Cambridge in the late nineteenth century to mobilize students for missionary outreach. Australian C. Stacey Woods studied at the dispensationalist Dallas Theological Seminary and evangelical Wheaton College before directing the Canadian Inter-Varsity.⁵ Impressed with Woods's work in Canada, Herbert Taylor provided a downtown Chicago office, secretary, and grant funds from the Christian Workers Foundation to establish the American branch. IVCF posed the first major conservative challenge to the mainline Protestant dominance of university ministry.

The pursuit of God's will was preeminent in the early IVCF, as displayed in the autumn 1941 debut issue of house organ *HIS*. The editorial "Which College—And Why?" weighed the value of attending a Christian college versus a secular university. Conceding the merits of both, *HIS* editors offered the following maxim: "the *summum bonum* for any Christian is in the center of God's will—wherever that may be. Thus, the only place you should be this fall semester is the place where God has sent you. If you aren't sure that you are where you are because He put you there, you had better find out, and if necessary get out.

⁵ A. Donald MacLeod, *C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

And the quicker you do it the better.”⁶ America’s entry into World War II shortly thereafter complicated this question, as many young male evangelicals begrudgingly accepted military service as part of God’s plan for their lives.⁷ In the 1940s, fundamentalists did not tout military service as the highest calling or conflate American foreign policy with God’s will. Instead, during an era when the U.S. military was dominated by mainline Protestant chaplains and immoral soldiers, the war provided opportunities to evangelize.⁸ Those not drafted weighed the decision carefully, as shown in an August 1944 *HIS* article. In “Seminary in War Time,” divinity student Robert Oerter criticized the pressure on his peers to enlist as military chaplains and soldiers, though he confessed his own struggle. “In these days of distraction,” he wrote, “I must scrutinize my position.” One part of him wondered, “Am I in God’s will? Do I have the right to a cloistered life free from the noise and danger of battle?” But another part reluctantly confessed a “natural desire to get into this huge conflict.” As Oerter realized, decisions to enlist were not always made from the purest of motives. Moreover, patriotic duty did not come before Christian duty, and the home front still needed well-trained pastors during the crisis hour. “Above all,” he said, “there is one thing that keeps me in seminary—that is God’s will. It is dangerous to be anywhere except in the will of the Lord! If I lacked the calm assurance of God’s leading, I couldn’t stay in this place.”⁹

Another window into the war’s influence on evangelical PLP is Shirley Nelson’s 1978 novel *The Last Year of the War*, inspired by her student experiences at Moody Bible Institute in the 1944-45 academic year. Jo, the protagonist, offends her brother by converting

⁶ “Which College—and Why?” *HIS*, Fall 1941. See also Hunt and Hunt, *For Christ and the University*, 75.

⁷ “Are Your War Years Wasted?” *HIS*, December 1944, 18-20.

⁸ See Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military, 1942-1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Mark Amstutz, *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).

⁹ Robert Oerter, “Seminary in Wartime,” *HIS*, August 1944, 23-24.

to evangelical Christianity and entering Bible school, shortly before he is killed in the war. While experiencing grief and doubt, she and her pious classmates talk frequently about being in the center of God's perfect will, and a male veteran returned to campus continually insists God's will is for them to be together.¹⁰ Evangelical leaders, meanwhile, detected a much larger significance to the Second World War for young adults: To prevent another world calamity, it was imperative to recruit young adults into God's army. This conviction impelled the founders of the patriotic high-school ministry Youth for Christ (YFC).

As a centralized organization, YFC coalesced at the annual Winona Lake Bible Conference in summer 1944, following a series of scattered mass evangelistic rallies across the country. During Memorial Day Weekend 1945, 75,000 attended a YFC rally in Chicago's Soldier Field celebrating both Christ and country. That July, again at Winona Lake, YFC held its first annual conference as a formal organization.¹¹ Founding President Torrey Johnson, pastor of Chicago's Moody Bible Church, expounded his vision for Christian revival spread by born-again youth, particularly in the cities smoldering from totalitarian collapse. "As goes Germany, so goes Western Europe," he prophesied. Thus, "What happens there will directly affect us, and so we need to get to Germany as soon as possible. We have no plan, but God has! If Hitler could make the youth in a nation move with his program, God, by the Holy Spirit, ought to be able to get the same youth into a program of His kind and it has to be done."¹²

To reach restless teenagers, YFC's mass, Saturday-night rallies featured jovial entertainment, gospel choruses, and 30-minute rather than hour-long sermons. Bearing the motto, "Geared to the Times; Anchored to the Rock," YFC's pioneering strategies

¹⁰ Shirley Nelson, *The Last Year of the War* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1978).

¹¹ Hefley, *God Goes to High School*, 25.

¹² Torrey Johnson, "Accepting the Challenge" (address to YFC Convention, July 26, 1945), box 13, folder 36, Youth for Christ Records, BGCA. See also James Enns, *Saving Germany: North American Protestants and Christian mission to West Germany, 1945-74* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2017), esp. ch. 3 on YFC's work.

profoundly influenced evangelical youth ministry and, according to historian Thomas Bergler, contributed to the broader “juvenilization” of American Christianity in the twentieth century.¹³ In 1945 YFC’s organ for publicizing rallies evolved into a more comprehensive magazine with feature articles, regular columns, and inspirational messages written in the teenage vernacular. *Youth for Christ (YFC)* magazine resembled *HIS* but targeted a teenage constituency not yet concerned with contemporary theological and cultural analysis, possibly even new to the faith. Nevertheless, the magazine content showed that PLP resonated equally with mature university students and bright-eyed high schoolers.

The June 1945 *YFC* issue covering the historic Soldier Field rally included the advice of future president Robert A. Cook, then prominent Chicago pastor and contributing editor, on “How to Know the Will of God.”¹⁴ Later that year, an essay by a high school student assured his peers, “You Can Be Successful” now, rejecting the older generation’s insistence that teenagers should expect to wait until adulthood to find God’s plan for their lives. “This is a day of youth!” he proclaimed. If Hollywood actors and entrepreneurs could achieve impressive feats before turning 25, Christians certainly could, as well.¹⁵ YFC’s enthusiastic, confident take on PLP pervaded the organization. As Johnson wrote in the March 1947 edition of “Torrey Talks to Teenagers,” after helping youth find assurance of salvation and a local church to attend, YFC’s final objective was “of supreme importance, find a place of life service for the Lord Jesus Christ according to the Will of God. Young man! Young lady! Have YOU discovered the Will of God for your life? Are you preparing in school and otherwise to realize God’s plan? Have you surrendered your all and said, ‘Lord, make my life a blessing!’?” YFC, he maintained, had not completed its job until

¹³ Thomas Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 147-75.

¹⁴ Robert A. Cook, “How to Know the Will of God,” *YFC*, June 1945, 2-3.

¹⁵ Harry Albus, “You Can Be Successful Now!” *YFC*, Nov/Dec 1945, 7-9.

young people born again in its rallies went “all out for Christ into a life of service and usefulness for Him.”¹⁶

Revivalistic fundamentalism and Victorious Life teaching pervaded 1940s IVCF and YFC. Not only were the organizations geographically close to Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, their founders held degrees from the schools, as well as Dallas Theological Seminary. Discerning God’s will, as presented in a 1942 *HIS* essay, was one step on the road to success in the “Victorious Christian life.”¹⁷ John Walvoord, eminent Bible scholar at Dallas, contributed “What the Holy Spirit Can Mean for Your Life” in 1944, drawing upon the theology of his mentor, Lewis Sperry Chafer. Only by following the Holy Spirit’s “evident leading,” “the ordered steps indicated by divine instruction,” could one achieve “effective service” and “fullest blessing.”¹⁸ Although conservative in theology, Woods eschewed the separatist, militant ethos characterizing 1930s American fundamentalism and cooperated with those who held gospel truths, regardless of their denominational association.¹⁹

IVCF’s moderate stance on separation occasioned debates over the boundaries of God’s will. The response to Oerter, the wartime seminarian, illuminated this. Oerter struck a nerve with more conservative *HIS* readers, due not to his avoidance of patriotic service but to his choice of training institution, Princeton Theological Seminary, which had embraced Modernist theology. The next month’s issue printed a letter to the editor by a founding faculty member of Faith Theological Seminary—the dispensationalist break-off of Presbyterian Westminster Theological Seminary. Peter Stam, Jr., praised Oerter’s “courageous” stance, agreeing that spiritual needs and God’s will trumped all else. “But too

¹⁶ Johnson, “Torrey Talks to Teenagers,” *YFC*, March 1947.

¹⁷ “How You Can Succeed in Christian life,” *HIS*, October 1942, 6-7.

¹⁸ John Walvoord, “What the Holy Spirit Can Mean in Your Life,” *HIS*, October 1944, 26-29.

¹⁹ Hunt and Hunt, 60.

bad about his choice of seminary. Is it likely to be God's will for young men to attend modernist or middle-of-the-road seminaries where faith is weakened or undermined rather than strengthened?" Stam closed, "Sound the alarm!"²⁰ An October letter from a Wheaton undergraduate protested, "Mr. Stam has no right to suggest what the leading of the Lord might be for another."²¹ Then former Wheaton College President and fissiparous Presbyterian fundamentalist J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., stepped in. The December issue's top letter, entitled "Anti-Biblical Mysticism," said, "If it is true that 'Mr. Stam has no right to suggest what the leading of the Lord might be for another,' it would follow that no pastor has a right to take his Bible and point out the 'thus saith the Lord' to an erring brother. Paul's words to Timothy, 'Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching' (II Tim 4:2), and a hundred other scriptural commands to Christian leaders must all be brushed aside in the interest of anti-Biblical mysticism."²²

For seminarians and movement leaders, the debate over ecclesiastical separation surrounded PLP; for the typical young adult, however, the more pressing question was cultural separation. God's will for the individual—wherever it led—entailed sexual purity and a lifestyle separating one from overt "worldliness." Since the massive cultural shift witnessed after the First World War, fundamentalist leaders and colleges had branded certain amusements taboo.²³ One of the most comprehensive postwar expositions of PLP demonstrated the ongoing conflation of God's will for the individual with strict cultural separation. In 1946 S. Maxwell Coder, Moody Bible Institute's Dean of Christian Education, published the three-part correspondence course *Youth Triumphant*. Advertised in multiple issues of YFC magazine, the second instalment expounded *God's Will for Your Life* in ten

²⁰ "Fears Princeton," Readers Say, *HIS*, September 1944, 2.

²¹ "Calling Mr. Stam," Readers Say, *HIS*, October 1944, 2.

²² "Anti-biblical Mysticism," Readers Say, *HIS*, December 1944, 2.

²³ Timothy E. Fulop, "The Wheaton College Pledge: Student Behavior Codes and Religious Identity," *Fides et Historia* 32, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2000), 23-38. See also Barry Hankins, *Jesus and Gin: The Roaring Twenties and Today's Culture Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

lessons and mail-in exams. The concluding lesson, “Opportunities for Triumph,” offered a thirty-page exposition of the supposed pagan/satanic origins and disastrous effects of “the movies,” “the theater and opera,” “the modern dance,” “jazz and swing music,” “cards,” “smoking,” and other secular activities.²⁴

In its early years, YFC held to the prevailing fundamentalist behavioral taboos and advised Christian students to avoid places with any worldly associations—even roller-skating rinks. After succeeding Torrey Johnson as President of YFC in 1948, Robert A. Cook released *Now that I Believe*, a popular guide for the young, born-again Christian which has sold millions of copies in 27 languages. *Moody Monthly* compared it to the previous century’s classic, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, effusing, “Not since the days of the Whithall-Smith book has there been such an important contribution to literature of this kind.”²⁵ Cook addressed nine chief concerns of the born-again life. The eighth chapter, “What shall I do with my life?” answered the questions, “How will I know to what field God is calling me? How can I know I am in the will of God?” The ninth, final chapter tackled “Worldliness—and what to do about it.” Without becoming “dead to the world,” Cook insisted, “you will always be irked by high Christian standards, and you’ll never be completely, spontaneously happy in God’s will.”²⁶ In lieu of a specific “list of dos and don’ts,” Cook exhorted believers to consider, among other things, whether an action would identify them with Christ’s followers or with the world’s crowd, and whether it would “stand the test of His eyes and holiness at the judgment seat.”²⁷

At the same time, by aiming to be “geared to the times but anchored to the rock,” YFC tested the fundamentalist subculture’s boundaries. Some magazine readers submitted

²⁴ S. Maxwell Coder, *God’s Will for Your Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1946), 93-123.

²⁵ Books, *Moody Monthly*, December 1949.

²⁶ Robert Cook, *Now that I Believe* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1949), 101.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

critical letters to the editor and even canceled subscriptions due to the flashy format, use of slang, or any hints of immodesty. From a theologically-reasoned position, IVCF's Woods boldly challenged conservative mores in a much-discussed 1945 *HIS* article, "Taboo." "Worldliness," he taught, entailed living for anything (career, family, even Christian service) over Christ himself.²⁸ A July article grouched about the "trouble with 'fundamentalist' students," criticizing their arbitrary theological method, archaic vocabulary, lack of social concern, and legalistic morality.²⁹ The piece cited NAE founder Harold Ockenga's ministry approvingly for his intellectual defense of orthodoxy, joyful demeanor, and a packed schedule which left little time for unwholesome amusements. For the next several years, the youth movements indeed busied themselves with a major endeavor: evangelizing the world.

Missionary Zeal: IVCF and Urbana

With World War II winding down, the sense of obligation to the unevangelized fields intensified, leading evangelical youth leaders not simply to highlight missionary careers as an honorable, needed vocation but to make missions the overall framework of PLP. David H. Adeney (1911-1994), a Cambridge-educated, British leader in the China Inland Mission, began laying the postwar program's foundations in 1942, when he served IVCF temporarily as missionary secretary.³⁰ In his strategy, each local campus chapter would elect a missionary secretary whose duties included, in part, helping students to find "God's plan for their lives" and thereby avoid settling for God's "second best."³¹ PLP thus became the prerogative of IVCF's Missions Department. Rhetoric similar to Adeney's appeared

²⁸ C. Stacey Woods, "Taboo," *HIS*, June 1945, 31-35. See also Hunt and Hunt, 94.

²⁹ "The trouble with fundamentalist students," *HIS*, July 1945, 18-20. The sentiments foreshadowed Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1947).

³⁰ Carolyn Armitage, *Reaching for the Goal: The Life Story of David Adeney: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission* (Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1993).

³¹ David Adeney, "Accent on Evangelism," *HIS* (October 1942), 21-22; Ibid, "Missionary Secretary Lends Zip to Zeal," *HIS*, January 1943, 13-14.

again in *HIS* shortly before D-Day. In “If you have missed God’s best,” a career missionary advised older constituents who had chosen to stay stateside rather than journey overseas to relinquish regrets and instead pursue “God’s best” wherever they were now. This could mean, for example, putting “forth the same zeal with your Sunday School class that you would if they were black youngsters in the heart of Africa.”³²

To be fair, in the mid-1940s some were skeptical of the youthful missionary zeal. Maxwell Coder, for example, noted the habit of students mistaking the “romance” of the mission field for God’s call to it.³³ A November 1944 essay in *HIS*, “God is calling—where?” by Mildred Cable (1877-1952), a pioneering CIM missionary to central Asia, criticized the constant pressure upon students to pursue missionary careers rather than to learn God’s “specific orders” to individuals, even those who stayed home.³⁴ “As a Christian, you have one, and only one, right place in [the Church].” God could guide a student to hear about an area of greatest need. Despite Cable’s intention to curb foreign-missions myopia, the editors juxtaposed her piece with the following inset advertisement: “Urgently Needed: *HIS* has been notified of three women medical missionaries to go immediately to India.”³⁵

Shaped by wartime experiences of the draft and rationing, American evangelicals made heavy use of military metaphors for the Christian life.³⁶ In “God’s Guidance and Your Life Work,” printed in 1947 in *HIS* magazine and distributed separately as a pamphlet, Summer Institute of Linguistics President Kenneth Pike wrote: “In the universal draft one does not prove his right to go to the forces but must establish his right to stay home. Instead of waiting for a call to go, the missionary candidate must consider whether he has a

³² Kenneth Geiser, “If You Have Missed God’s Best,” *HIS*, May 1945, 3-4.

³³ Coder, *God’s Will for your Life*, 75.

³⁴ Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 107.

³⁵ Mildred Cable, “God is Calling—Where?” *HIS*, November 1944, 8-10.

³⁶ Military metaphors were common in the heyday of the Anglo-American missionary movement. See Jeffrey Swanson, *Echoes of the Call: Identity and Ideology Among American-Evangelical Missionaries in Ecuador* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79-80.

legitimate reason for staying home.”³⁷ American-evangelical veterans, many of whom had never left the U.S. prior to war, returned home with knowledge of overseas needs and a sense of duty to rectify them. The nation’s ascendancy to global power—the “pax Americana”—fueled a boom in foreign missionary activity, with NAE-affiliated leaders organizing the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association in 1945 to help conservative mission boards coordinate strategy.³⁸ Indeed, the time was ripe for “Missionary Advance,” the theme IVCF chose for a 1946 missions conference organized with the Student Foreign Missions Fellowship. Since IVCF’s founding, Woods had discussed collaboration between the two organizations; in 1945 they merged, with the SFMF directing IVCF’s missions wing. Consequently, students at mainstream universities, not simply Bible colleges, were exposed to the maxim that they should prove why God’s plan for their lives did not include overseas work.³⁹ Held between Christmas and New Year’s Day at the University of Toronto, the 1946 Student Missionary Convention welcomed 575 mission-minded students. Before the clock struck midnight on New Year’s Eve, McQuilkin urged attendees to hasten Christ’s return through the evangelization of the world.⁴⁰

A 1948 convention followed the Toronto meeting, after IVCF secured the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign’s campus for use during the holiday week. Typically, every three years thereafter, IVCF organized a missionary convention that later became known simply as “Urbana.” Attended by mostly North American university students—with a steady contingent of international students—each five-day conference featured morning Bible

³⁷ Kenneth Pike, “God’s Guidance and Your Lifework,” *HIS*, January 1947, 19-28.

³⁸ Richard V. Pierard, “*Pax Americana* and the Evangelical Missionary Advance,” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Carpenter and William Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 155-79; Robert T. Coote, “The Uneven Growth of Conservative Evangelical Missions,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 6, no. 3 (July 1982): 118-23.

³⁹ The SVM’s early correspondence with the SFMF/IVCF, and the latter’s promotional materials, are found in Series IX, Box 648, Intersity Christian Fellowship, Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Mission Records, Yale Divinity Archives, New Haven, CT. See also “Student Volunteer Movement Conventions,” Box 14, Acc 15-21, Intersity, BGCA.

⁴⁰ “Six Days That Meant Missionary Advance,” *HIS*, March 1947, 10-13.

expositions, inspirational and informational sessions, opportunities to meet with mission board representatives, and evening plenary addresses stoking missionary motivation. The stage welcomed missionaries, missiologists, theologians, Christian nationals from the global East and South, and other celebrated speakers from the United States and Great Britain. As the convention grew from 575 attendees in 1946 to over 3,400 in 1957, it became the focal point of IVCF—and the discussion of God’s will for one’s life.

Promotional material distributed to local campus chapters bore the tag line: “Have you discovered God’s plan for your life?”⁴¹ Within *HIS*, the Missions Department plugged the conferences and printed plenary speeches issuing a corporate call to foreign service. Leading to the 1948 convention, recently elected Missionary Secretary T. Norton Sterrett promised readers that numerous missionary representatives attending would provide “counsel on important spiritual questions,” listing as the first of these, “finding God’s will for the life.”⁴² Published in the magazine and in pamphlet form, Sterrett’s *Called by God—and Sure of It* dually maintained, “Every Christian should be certain they are doing the work God wants him or her to do,” and “Every Christian has been called to face the facts of the foreign field.” With purportedly 100 Christian witnesses in America for every one witness abroad, young believers should seek the missionary call first.⁴³ After Urbana ’48, Sterrett’s Bible study booklet, *Therefore, Go*, was distributed to local IVCF and SFMF chapters to stimulate missionary interest. As the first line explained, the text had been “prepared to help you find God’s will for your life.” This, first and foremost, meant which role to fill in “God’s plan of evangelization.” In its ten short lessons, *Therefore Go* taught that the “Bible is the

⁴¹ Urbana ’48 promotion, Box 338, Folder 4, IVCF Records, BGCA.

⁴² T. Norton Sterrett, “Onto Urbana,” *HIS*, November 1948, 27.

⁴³ Sterrett, *Called by God—and Sure of It* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 1949), 11-12; Idem, *HIS*, December 1948, 24-25.

record of God's purpose and plan to restore a proper relationship between Himself and...man"; this divine mission drove all "history, both sacred and secular."⁴⁴

Sterrett's teaching was in harmony with the wider evangelical world in the late 1940s. The lead editorial of *Moody Monthly*'s August 1949 issue, dedicated to missions, insisted that Christian identity enjoined missionary concern. In another article, Missions Editor Harold Cook said the missionary call was, first and foremost, a general call to all Christians, derived from the Great Commission and global need. The individual component was the Holy Spirit opening one's ears to hear the call. Christians who had not been called to a specific country should not assume they had a call to stay home: "A call to service is as necessary for ministry in Middletown, USA, as for one in a Congo village."⁴⁵ Harold Lindsell, director of the Missions Department of Fuller Theological Seminary since its 1947 founding, taught in *A Christian Philosophy of Missions* (1949) that "the burden of proof rests upon the individual to show that God has not called him to go."⁴⁶

The call to missions increasingly enjoined sacrificial commitment. In a March 1948 *HIS* article, "Being Willing Isn't Enough," founder of the South American-based New Tribes Mission Paul Fleming lamented the number of students he encountered who claimed willingness to go but never took any steps to arrive.⁴⁷ Fleming recounted speaking to one young woman who defended going into nursing simply because it was a "good thing to do" while refusing to apply the same, objective rationale to missions. How could she make that major life decision without any "special leading from the Lord," but when it came to "giving her life wholly to the Lord's service" she required divine revelation? He closed, "So many of us are selfish, living only for ourselves. We like to entertain the thought that we're willing to

⁴⁴ Idem, *Therefore, Go* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1949), 1.

⁴⁵ Editorial; Harold Cook, "Called to Be a Missionary," *Moody Monthly*, August 1949, 884.

⁴⁶ Harold Lindsell, *A Christian Philosophy of Missions* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1949), 163.

⁴⁷ Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 215.

follow Jesus Christ, but the truth of the matter is that it is only with our lips that we are willing.”⁴⁸

In August 1949 Wesley Gustafson assumed the Missionary Secretary position which he held until 1953, ushering in an era marked by rhetoric of self-denial. A June 1950 article, “So Many Volunteers—So few Missionaries!” vividly displayed Gustafson’s signature emphasis on self-sacrifice. In the piece, also published as a pamphlet, he decried the thousands of students who made emotionally-charged missionary commitments before allowing doubt or circumstances to keep them home. Listing common excuses such as the lure of domestic ministerial positions, “indifference and disobedience to Christ’s clear command,” and alleged poor health—likely due to personal negligence—he assailed one circumstance particularly harshly. “*Marriage—or engagement—is also a bitter enemy of fulfilling Christ’s will that all should hear of him.*” Although a “God-given” “blessing,” marriage must not “hinder God’s purpose for one’s life.”⁴⁹ For evangelical Protestants, who had lauded marriage and family life, Gustafson’s call to celibacy was serious.

To learn and fulfill one’s duty, all students, according to Gustafson, should attend Urbana ’51. In a December 1951 convention promotion, “In God’s Place at God’s Time,” he said, “This is the *only* such opportunity you will have in your lifetime...Has the truth of this really gripped you? Then, since you’re sure it is God’s will for you to be there, we will see you at Urbana! We know you want to do God’s will.”⁵⁰ The title and subtitle of an advertisement published one month earlier was no less adamant: “This May Change Your Life! Are you honest about your desire to know God’s will for your life?” A truly “serious” student would “investigate seriously the possibility of missionary service.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Paul Fleming, “Being Willing Isn’t Enough,” *HIS*, March 1948, 27.

⁴⁹ Wesley Gustafson, “So Many Volunteers—So Few *Missionaries*,” *HIS*, June 1950, 3.

⁵⁰ Gustafson, “In God’s Place at God’s Time,” *HIS*, December 1951, 34-36.

⁵¹ “This May Change Your Life,” *HIS*, November 1951, 11.

As will be discussed below, international affairs between the 1948 and 1951 Urbana conferences stymied the American missionary advance, particularly in Asia. Nevertheless, Urbana '51 continued to call university students to their duty. Woods captured the theme in his own introductory words: "It is our purpose during these days to rethink God's program for world evangelism. But more than that, it is our purpose to face God's will for us in terms of his program for our generation." The "supreme function on earth" for all Christians was to proclaim the gospel. "That is your life work; that is your vocation and mine; and that is Christ's command." Consequently, he said, it was "utterly impossible for any Christian under any circumstance to speak about being in the will of God if he is not living in terms of world evangelism."⁵²

As various speakers discussed God's will, the theme of sacrifice recurred. "The Categorical Imperative," delivered by Paul Lindell of the World Mission Prayer League, said that his willingness to give up his fiancé for the mission field arrived after a days-long struggle to heed "what the Lord was saying to me."⁵³ Pioneering missionary doctor Northcote Deck contended that students were "enlisted" in God's service, whether or not they served overseas. "There's no release from this war," he said, "And you and I must know more and more, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, of hardness for His sake." Alluding to the nation's growing prosperity, he added, "We're getting too soft these days. We want too many luxuries." Christians needed strengthened character to be "willing to have a larger share of the sufferings of Christ in our ministry."⁵⁴ In some instances, Woods put a check on calls to excessive sacrifice; he knew, for example, young men who had made hasty, unrealistic vows to forego marriage but later married. Rather than blindly committing to a seemingly more holy lifestyle, Christian students should focus on continually pursuing

⁵² Woods, "The Impelling Motive," unpublished Urbana '51 compendium, 7, box 338, folder 2, IVCF Records, BGCA.

⁵³ Paul Lindell, "The Categorical Imperative," unpublished Urbana '51 compendium, 30.

⁵⁴ Northcote Deck, "Christ Proclaimed!" unpublished Urbana '51 compendium, 40.

God's unfolding will.⁵⁵ In Gustafson's preface to a conference compendium—not formally published but distributed to Urbana attendees—he pressed, “Do you pray each day for guidance as to your part in reaching those who have never heard?” His benediction implored, “God grant that for many it may be now—‘See you in Africa, India, Europe—in the place that God wants you! [emphasis original].”⁵⁶ All students had a part and a place in missions—ideally, across an ocean.

To help students solidify their commitment to missions in discerning God's will, IVCF's Missions Department presented them with two response cards: “My Missionary Purpose” and “My Missionary Prayer Promise.” The cards, distributed at Urbana and throughout the academic year, matched those the SFMF had used since its founding which, in turn, were based on the Student Volunteer Movement's original missionary pledge cards. The SVM had revised its cards to broaden missionary service beyond foreign fields to include Christian work “at home.”⁵⁷ The SFMF intentionally revived the original, restricted focus. Explaining this policy in a 1948 *HIS* article, McQuilkin said, “The Student FMF does not suggest that the highest calling is for people to go to the foreign field. The highest calling is to be in the will of God. But young people called for full-time Christian service should face first the question as to whether the Lord's will is for them to go to the place of greatest need.” Recalling Robert Speer's turn-of-the-century position, McQuilkin bemoaned the “appalling disproportion between the number of workers in what may be called the homeland and the foreign land.”⁵⁸ The SFMF's Missionary Purpose card stated:

Knowing that Jesus Christ has saved me from my sin; that all men without Christ are lost, and there is no other name by which men may be saved; that God's command is, “Go ye into all the world”; that the laborers are few in the foreign field;” and

⁵⁵ Woods, “The Impelling Motive,” 3.

⁵⁶ Gustafson, Introduction, unpublished Urbana '51 compendium, 1.

⁵⁷ “Student Volunteer Movement Conventions, 1947-55,” Box 14, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

⁵⁸ Robert C. McQuilkin, “Why the Foreign Mission Fellowship,” *HIS* (March 1948), 23.

“believing it is God’s will for me, *I purpose to be a foreign missionary*, and will plan accordingly. Until he leads me to the field I will support the work by my prayers, gifts, and witnessing.”⁵⁹

The “Missionary Promise” card altered the commitment clause to say, “believing that it may be God’s will for me to be a foreign missionary, *I promise to pray definitely for guidance*, and in other ways to seek guidance until I know whether or not it is God’s will for me to go into foreign missionary service.”⁶⁰ Although both cards included a caveat allowing for God to redirect the individual to another field of service, this left unchanged the obligation “to give foreign missions its rightful place of prominence.” Thus, students signing the cards either prepared for departure or sought God’s leading abroad.

In an official card procedure circulated in May 1950, Gustafson instructed staffers, “For those to whom it is not clear as to which card they should sign, urge them to take one of each.” Furthermore, he “urged” local IVCF chapter leaders “to present the cards to [their] entire group of Christians—not just those interested in missions.” The procedure also included a process for Missions Department administrators to follow up with card signers involving three sets of letters and pamphlets. Gustafson’s specific steps for discerning guidance to the field will be discussed below. But the tone of the letters and materials—which included his “So Many Volunteers—So Few Missionaries!” tract and Fleming’s “Being Willing Isn’t Enough”—emphasized volunteers honoring their signed commitments. Another tract sent with the second appeal to those promising to pray for guidance reminded evangelical recipients of the horrible fate awaiting the unreached. The text came from Amy Carmichael (1867-1951), renowned missionary to India, and presented an allegorical vision of the desperate need for missionaries. A woman finds herself in a jungle, on the edge of a bottomless, dark pit, like the “mouth of Hell,” into which scores of blinded adults and children unknowingly plunge, single-file, screaming as they go. Meanwhile, a group sitting

⁵⁹ “My Missionary Purpose” card, Box 6, Folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

⁶⁰ “My Missionary Promise” card, Box 6, Folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

idly nearby, the “picture of peace,” tell her to ignore the screams, since she had not a “definite call” to go save the blind.⁶¹ 35% of the 1646 attendees to Urbana ’51 received this gut-wrenching tract. Meanwhile, 60% of attendees received literature about fulfilling their stated “purpose” to be a foreign missionary.⁶²

The early Urbana conventions reflected a wider postwar boom in student missionary interest and revival more generally.⁶³ Billy Graham, meanwhile, began drawing crowds of thousands to his nationwide crusade, his anti-Communist message resonating with Americans fearing the specter of atomic holocaust. In March 1950 *Moody Monthly* editor William Culbertson posed the alarming possibility, “Two More Years to Work?” and yet assured his readers that God remained in control:

Whatever the prophetic picture and however dark some of the details of it may be, we can be absolutely sure that the unrest of the present and the impending disaster that seems to loom ahead will in God’s own way work out His purpose and His will. Here is a great hope and consolation for the child of God in the midst of a picture which otherwise might cause him, not only great anxiety, but deep and profound forebodings.

All believers, especially students, must resist apathy. “Young man, is God calling you to service? Get your preparation, and get to the work. Young woman, is the Spirit of God speaking to your heart about surrender and a life of usefulness in the hands of God? Then stop tampering with the advances of the Holy Spirit.... Stop holding back in...what you know God wants you to do.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ “One Jungle Night,” tract by Amy Carmichael, box 6, folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

⁶² Lois Thiessen, “Missionary Convention Report,” *HIS*, March 1952, 1-2.

⁶³ After a revival swept through Wheaton College’s campus in winter 1950, 39% of the senior class went onto full-time missionary work—the highest percentage of alumni missionaries in the school’s history. Mary Dorsett, “Wheaton’s Past Revivals,” in *Accounts of a Campus Revival: Wheaton College 1995*, ed. Timothy Beougher and Lyle Dorsett (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 68.

⁶⁴ William Culbertson, “Two More Years to Work?” *Moody Monthly*, March 1950,

Missionary Zeal: Youth for Christ

Since adding “International” to its name in 1945, Youth for Christ supported missions by organizing mass evangelistic rallies around the world, which were publicized in the magazine. Cook’s *Now that I Believe* strongly tied the “surrendered” life to the missionary vocation. The chapter, “What Shall I do with My Life?” maintained, “Always remember that your one business as a Christian is to aid in completing the evangelization of the world,” and warned that there was “nothing more bitter than the cry of a person who realizes too late that he should have been in the ministry or on the mission field but got sidetracked into business or homemaking instead.”⁶⁵

In March 1950 the magazine debuted its first annual Missions Special Issue, featuring articles by authorities in the field. L.E. Maxwell, President of the missions-focused Prairie Bible Institute in Canada, presented his answer to the perennial question, “What is a missionary call?” Like McQuilkin, he quoted Ion Keith Falconer’s challenge to prioritize the areas of greatest need. The issue also included several pages of testimonies of students who had determined that God planned for them to be overseas missionaries.⁶⁶ In addition, President Cook editorialized that with crises abounding worldwide, YFC should temper its atmosphere of entertainment for serious prayer and evangelistic outreach.⁶⁷ Graham perennially issued his own summonses to service in 1950, in July telling youth to “hazard their lives” for the Gospel, following the example set by persecuted Christians in China.⁶⁸ “Our Supreme Task,” a speech he gave that year to Robert McQuilkin’s Columbia Bible College, prompted 500 students to volunteer for the field, and the text was featured in the

⁶⁵ Robert Cook, *Now that I Believe*, 91, 93.

⁶⁶ L. E Maxwell, “What Is a Missionary Call?” *YFC*, March 1950, 12-13.

⁶⁷ Robert Cook, “Mid-century Crossroads,” *YFC*, July 1950, 8-9.

⁶⁸ Billy Graham, “Revival Must Not Stay in America,” *YFC*, July 1950, 10-11.

following year's Missions Issue.⁶⁹ Missionary sacrifice started with the soul, as another article in the March 1951 issue reminded students. Becoming a Christian was itself a call to leave "people and things," to endure "sacrifice and separation," and to step "away from the world to Himself." God then demanded the Christian to present oneself as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto the Lord," as taught in Romans 12:1. Any Christian expecting divine leading to a foreign field must first cultivate this self-abnegating faith, begin training intensely, and gain "some experience in full time service."⁷⁰

The pressure on students to sacrifice, in spirit and in life, for the sake of the gospel was palpable. YFC's strongest summons to the mission field came from Kenny Joseph, a young man who had converted in 1946 at the Chicagoland rally at Soldier Field and was preparing to go to Japan with the Evangelical Alliance Mission. In the April 1951 feature, "Here I am, Lord, send my sister!" Joseph presented his own testimony, written in third-person prose, of acknowledging his personal responsibility to evangelism. As was common among evangelicals at the time, Joseph situated God's "particular" will for the individual Christian within his "general" will for world evangelization, as follows:

He reasoned if he would get on the super highway of God's will for *every* [orig] believer, the mission field, that he would get moving on that highway toward the mission field, even at two miles an hour. God could steer him, could lead him into the special, particular road of service. He found out that God cannot steer a parked car, but that he can get into the driver's seat and guide us to be a missionary pastor, a missionary farmer, or a missionary businessman. Or a missionary nurse, a missionary housewife. Or a missionary to Japan, or Africa, or South America, or other fields. He discovered that God's *general* (orig) will for every believer is missions, world evangelization and soul-winning. His particular will for every believer is revealed to the individual in the measure that he volunteers his body to the general will of God. 'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'⁷¹

God's adversary, Joseph warned, would attempt to thwart the divine will through tempting Christians to complacency. "Satan worked in three ways," Joseph taught. "First, he would

⁶⁹ Idem., "Our Supreme Task," *YFC*, March 1951, 8-11.

⁷⁰ R.E. Thompson, "What Makes a Missionary?" *YFC*, March 1951, 12-14.

⁷¹ Kenny Joseph, "Here I am, Lord, Send My Sister!" *YFC*, April 1951, 44.

lead the young missionary volunteer to [the] choice of a beautiful, on fire, Christian girl, as a life companion.” Echoing IVCF’s Gustafson, Joseph taught that relinquishing marriage was just one of the “many ways a missionary call is a call to total self-denial and self-sacrifice.”⁷²

The July 1951 “Youth Counsellor” page, a regular column featuring editors’ answers to reader-submitted questions, reflected the intense pressure upon students. “There is so much emphasis these days on yielding for full-time service that some of us young people become confused. Does it mean we have missed the will of God if we go into secular work, and not into full-time Christian service?” The Counsellor responded, “All Christians are called into Christian service.” God would guide an earnest Christian but he or she must “be just as sure God has called him into secular work as into spiritual work.” The column concluded by noting that “excellent opportunities afford themselves these days for secular employment overseas, making it possible for one to earn his livelihood and at the same time be of great help to missionary work.”⁷³ Regardless of the specific work one did, relocating outside of the U.S. was preferable.

In the 1952 Missions Issue, YFC’s editors featured another guilt-inducing piece by Kenny Joseph. In “Where are the 950?” Joseph condemned the purportedly high attrition rate of prospective missionaries—allegedly only 50 out of 1000 “volunteers” made it to the field. As for those who did not, according to Joseph, “You’ll find them scattered on hundreds of side roads, detours, dead end streets...tragic emotional and spiritual wrecks off the main super highway of God’s will.” He identified two types of volunteers who failed to go: The first group, those “at home, out of God’s will,” included one man who prioritized money over missions and two women who chose marriage. The second group—all three examples were men--were those “at home, in God’s will,” including one “seminary president” whose vaguely disguised name was Dr. Bob Jones, president of the fundamentalist Baptist Bible

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Youth Counsellor,” *YFC*, July 1951, 58.

institute in Greenville, South Carolina, which happened to be Joseph's alma mater. Joseph closed by issuing an ominous prophecy (and referencing a radio show about a private investigator willing to face any danger for his clients): "Will God's judgment have to be poured out on us personally and as a nation before we carry out our marching orders instead of 'letting George do it?'"⁷⁴

The Discernment Process

For evangelical youth ministries in the early 1950s, the objective need for foreign missionaries was the first consideration for PLP. Yet individuals required further divine guidance to determine the specific country, mission board, and training. In addition, PLP encompassed various decisions beyond vocation. As students and adults clamored for a step-by-step discernment method, mid-century leaders frequently invoked nineteenth-century classics on guidance by George Müller, F.B. Meyer, and missionary heroes.⁷⁵ For example, the November 1944 issue of *HIS* recommended Müller's six-step system to a reader deliberating over an imminent decision, maintaining that the question could not be "better answered than by George Müller of Bristol, England, whose life of faith and personal guidance has made his name a synonym for personal dependence on God."⁷⁶ Moody Bible's Coder agreed, writing, "Probably no better brief statement on how to discover the will of God has ever been written."⁷⁷ *Moody Monthly's* March 1951 Youth Supplement deemed Müller's advice a "foolproof formula for guidance."⁷⁸ YFC's Cook, meanwhile, specifically

⁷⁴ Joseph, "Where are the 950?" *YFC*, March 1952, 12-14.

⁷⁵ On Müller and Meyer, see ch. 1.

⁷⁶ "How Can I Be Sure of God's Will for Me?" *HIS*, November 1944, 23.

⁷⁷ Coder, *God's Will for Your Life*, 79.

⁷⁸ Youth Supplement, *Moody Monthly*, March 1951.

recommended Meyer's *Secret of Guidance*.⁷⁹ Even without directly citing these texts, mid-century leaders' advice often shared affinities with them.

Self-denial pervaded these texts. G. Christian Weiss, former missionary to North Africa, directed the Gospel Missionary Union and the "Back to the Bible" radio show's missions department. Weiss's *The Perfect Will of God* (1950), still in print, deemed "surrender," "separation from the world," and "self-crucifixion" necessary for knowing God's will.⁸⁰ V. Raymond Edman, President of Wheaton College since 1940, former missionary to Ecuador, and speaker at Urbana '48, wrote numerous devotional books throughout his career. *The Disciplines of Life* (1948), one of his most beloved, included a meditation on the "Discipline of Discernment."⁸¹ Edman wrote, "Self-pity makes us sulky; self-denial makes us strong in the Saviour. Self-preservation makes us sensitive to imagined slights; complete surrender to the will of God makes us sweet under all circumstances." Thus, "by submission to the divine will, and by resistance to any appeal to self and sin we discern between the way of God and the path of the destroyer."⁸² The last chapter, "The Discipline of Duty," dealt with specific guidance. Comparing modern believers to the biblical patriarchs, the Virgin Mary, and Paul, Edman said, "For you and me as for them, the will of God calls us to our duty."⁸³ Philadelphia-based Donald Gray Barnhouse, dispensationalist radio preacher, Presbyterian pastor, and editor of *Eternity* magazine,

⁷⁹ Robert Cook, "How to Know the Will of God," *YFC*, June 1945, 2-3.

⁸⁰ G. Christian Weiss, *The Perfect Will of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), 47, 55, 121.

⁸¹ Earl Cairns, *V. Raymond Edman: In the Presence of the King* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 198, 200.

⁸² V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1948), 169-71.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 248.

insisted in *God's Methods of Holy Living* (1951) that 90% of knowing God's will was being willing to do it in the first place.⁸⁴

The 1948 article, "God's plan for you," was one of the most popular pieces featured in the first few decades of *Christian Life*, a lay-oriented magazine reaching a large, broadly evangelical audience. Author Dale Harper taught that God's will for all Christians required heeding Jesus's command, "whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."⁸⁵ H.H. Savage, an influential Baptist pastor in Michigan and future NAE president, contributed his advice on the topic to the July 1949 *Christian Life*. He admitted that all the roles God had led him to fill conflicted with his own desires—and that was the point. "The very moment you and I say, 'This is what I want to do,' or 'This is the way I want to do it,' and start looking for the situation where our preconceived ideas can be the most completely satisfied, then there is trouble in ascertaining the will of God." Only those willing to "take a hard and difficult job" would have "no uncertainty" in the matter.⁸⁶

Thus, a holistic spirituality of self-denial underscored the process of discerning God's will for any decision. The first step to knowing God's will, therefore, was to "surrender" one's own, the common application of a scripture passage that anchored mid-century PLP, Romans 12:1-2, which said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."⁸⁷ In *Now that I Believe*, Cook opened the chapter, "What shall I do with my

⁸⁴ Donald Gray Barnhouse, *God's Methods of Holy Living* (Philadelphia, PA: Eternity Publishing, 1951), 121.

⁸⁵ Dale Harper, "God's Plan for You," *Christian Life* (January 1965 [orig., 1948]), 40.

⁸⁶ H.H. Savage, "Knowing the Will of God," *Christian Life*, July 1949, 21. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 90, establishes Savage as one of the early attendees of the New England Fellowship's conferences, the predecessor to the National Association of Evangelicals.

⁸⁷ Savage, "Knowing the Will of God," 21; Carl Thomas, "Good...Acceptable...Perfect," *HIS*, January 1951, 7-9; Margaret Erb, "God has a plan," *HIS*, June 1952, 1-4.

life?” with this verse, listing the ways a person must “surrender [life] absolutely to God without qualification and reservation.”⁸⁸ In *God’s Will for Your Life*, Coder called the passage the “central New Testament teaching about the subject.”⁸⁹ For Weiss, it was the “one great outstanding passage of Scripture that deals specifically with the matter of how to know God’s will.”⁹⁰

PLP demonstrated a transactional nature: If you were willing to do God’s specific will, actively surrendered your own, and continually obeyed God’s biblically revealed moral will, then you could expect to receive God’s specific direction through certain channels.⁹¹ Applying this process to the missionary call, *Moody Monthly’s* Harold Cook maintained that a believer must renounce all self-interest regarding the field of service or the motivation for it. A romantic longing for adventure or ambition for human praise deviated from God’s will.⁹² YFC’s Joseph said his personal experience of guidance taught him that “as he surrendered his will, ambition and motives to the Lord, either of two things would happen: [God] would lift the burden of missions, reward him for his motive of going and lead him into a field at home, or he would be burdened for a specific country and everything he would read, hear or see would point to that one place.”⁹³

Beyond this first step of surrender, writers advanced different combinations and permutations of steps to discern God’s will. The lack of a sole, recognized authority on the topic was a significant characteristic of PLP. Crucially, Scripture was *not* the only or, for

⁸⁸ Robert Cook, *Now that I Believe*, 90.

⁸⁹ Coder, *God’s Will for Your Life*, 69.

⁹⁰ Weiss, *Perfect Will of God*, 45.

⁹¹ Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 96-99, argues that this type of transactional piety reflected the deep influence of corporate America on early twentieth-century fundamentalism.

⁹² Harold Cook, “Called to be a Missionary,” 884.

⁹³ Joseph, “Here Am I, Send My Sister!” 45.

some, even the main source upon which PLP rested. Coder's primer taught that by "reason," "practical" "experience," and *then* scripture, it was evident God had a plan for the individual's life.⁹⁴ In *Called by God and Sure of It*, Sterrett maintained, "The experience of thousands, missionaries and others, proves that we can find and know the will of God." Gustafson encouraged Purpose Card signers to "talk to those you know are planning on the foreign mission field," asking them, "how did they find God's will?" Testimonies of missionary calling set expectations for how God worked. *Moody Monthly's* August 1949 issue featured the call stories of several contemporary missionaries. A follow-up article in September, "Their Missionary Calls," provided the accounts of nineteenth-century heroes such as David Livingstone, Adoniram Judson, and other British or American men—and noted that "not one of these seven really great missionaries saw a vision, dreamed a dream, or heard an audible voice calling him to the mission field" but instead were impelled by "missionary appeals and need."⁹⁵

Mid-century evangelicals, trusting in their epistemic abilities, derived unique discernment methods from a straightforward reading of Scripture texts, reflecting the ongoing influence of Common Sense philosophy. H.C. Thiessen, who chaired Wheaton College's Bible and Theology Department, was a leading twentieth-century proponent, as reflected in his 1944 instructions on PLP.⁹⁶ Citing numerous examples of God leading various Bible characters, Thiessen confidently taught, "Clearly, God has a plan for each life." The article title, "God's Blueprint [How can you know God's plan for your life?]," stressed the concrete accuracy of God's plans.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Coder, 8-10.

⁹⁵ Harold Cook, "Their Missionary Calls," *Moody Monthly*, September 1949, 22, 46.

⁹⁶ Mark Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37, no.2 (July 1985): 216-238, names Thiessen in a list of twentieth-century proponents.

⁹⁷ Henry Thiessen, "God's Blueprint [How can you know God's plan for your life?]," *HIS*, November 1944, 12.

Other than Romans 12, one of the most frequently recommended scripture texts was Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord; lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” IVCF’s Gustafson praised students who signed Missionary Promise cards: “This indicates that you are in earnest about finding God’s will for your life, and that you are willing to do that will, once it is revealed. Now you may confidently expect God to show you His will, for His promise is: [Prov. 3:5-6].” Savage called it the Bible’s “clearest counsel” for ascertaining God’s will.⁹⁸ YFC’s Cook, too, frequently referenced it, later naming it his favorite passage in a magazine poll of evangelical leaders. (Graham, showing off, recited all of Romans 12.)⁹⁹ Moody’s Coder dedicated a full lesson to these two verses, deriving from them the “threefold rule of earth’s wisest man.”¹⁰⁰

Following Proverbs 3, Psalm 37, particularly verses 5 and 23, appeared frequently and were applied similarly: “5 Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass,” and “23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way.” Some cited Psalm 37:4, too. This application of this verse was particularly significant to PLP’s changing ethos, as it dealt with desire: “Delight thyself in the Lord; and He will give thee the desires of thy heart.” Did this mean that if one loved God, He would grant all of one’s earthly wishes? Or was it tautological, teaching that if one naturally delighted in God—and thus desired Him—God’s constant presence would fulfill this? Savage used it to explain why he had pursued callings contrary to his preferences: God wanted Him to do so, and Savage was pleased to please God.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Coder contrasted

⁹⁸ Savage, “How You Can Know the Will of God.”

⁹⁹ “My favorite passage,” *YFC*, August 1954, 22; Cook, *Now that I Believe*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Coder, 41-49.

¹⁰¹ Savage, “How You Can Know the Will of God.”

delighting in the things of God with delighting in lesser, earthly pleasures and achievements.¹⁰²

While leaders referenced the passages above to generate a method for discerning God's will, applying the formula required regular, devotional Bible reading combined with study of specific passages addressing one's decision. YFC thus included a monthly Bible exposition, "Study to show thyself approved." At the same time, Cook encouraged youth wanting to know God's will to read the Bible "as God's message to them," avoiding "commentaries, sermons, personal biases, etc." This could entail looking for a passage that spoke to the individual, Cook said, although he acknowledged that many teachers discouraged this practice. Nevertheless, YFC's editor of Youth Counsellor conceded he had used this method successfully to determine that God wanted him to be a newspaper journalist. The author of *Christian Life's* 1948 article approvingly referenced a man who read the New Testament continuously until he found "what he feels is God's will for him."¹⁰³

Every *HIS* issue included an insert, "This Morning with God," to aid students' devotional Quiet Times, the daily period of Bible reading and prayer that by mid-century was an evangelical commonplace. Assigning a short scripture passage and blurb for each day of the month, readers were instructed to prayerfully consider, "What does this passage teach me (by illustration or statement) about Jesus Christ, God, myself, His will for my life?" The purpose of praying during the Quiet Time was not to alter God's will for one's life but to surrender oneself to it. After a session of "soul-purging," it was appropriate to ask God for decision-making wisdom, as well as explicit confirmation of a certain course of action.¹⁰⁴ What was not so clearly taught was *how* God confirmed his will to the individual. Indeed, the most debated aspect of the discernment process was how God, through the Holy Spirit,

¹⁰² Coder, 35-37.

¹⁰³ Harper, "God's Plan for You," 40-41.

¹⁰⁴ Harper, 41.

guided through impressions, feelings, an inner voice, or other subjective means. For decisions with explicitly moral ramifications, this was easier to ascertain. The Holy Spirit could bring to one's mind a relevant scripture passage or convict one's conscience of sinful aspects of a decision, including one's motivations for considering it.¹⁰⁵

Because PLP typically involved choosing between several perfectly moral options--jobs, universities, mission fields, potential spouses--evangelicals yearned for divine leading beyond conviction of sin. Some taught that the Holy Spirit's internal direction might not come during a single session of prayer but more naturally over time. IVCF's Margaret Erb wrote, "God's voice in your own life" could mean a growing concern for a specific country or a "sudden feeling of responsibility for the world's need" that prompted action.¹⁰⁶ Following Müller, it was generally agreed that one should feel peace after making a decision.¹⁰⁷

The trustworthiness of initial impressions was debated. In 1945 YFC's Cook specifically recommended Meyer's *The Secret of Guidance*, which taught that God gave individuals "impressions within." *Now that I Believe* omitted specific reference to Meyer but taught that God led through prayer, as follows:

Always follow through with what God told you when your knees were bent and your eyes were wet with tears. Never yield to cold-hearted rationalization that attempts to get your way at the expense of God's will. You *may convince yourself*, but you'll still be wrong if you forsake the counsel He gave you in the sanctuary of your soul. Keep a tender conscience, and dare to obey what God tells you in the time of prayer. Remember: There are no regrets when He leads!¹⁰⁸

Other evangelicals were more skeptical about subjective leading, as displayed by the controversy over wartime seminarian Robert Oerter's claim that God had led him to "liberal" Princeton Seminary. *Christian Life's* review of *God's Methods of Holy Living* claimed

¹⁰⁵ Coder, 74.

¹⁰⁶ Erb, "God has a plan," 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid; Weiss, 88, 101; Coder, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Cook, *Now that I Believe*, 93.

Barnhouse implied that “Christians receive direct revelation for divine guidance, an idea which has misled many fine Christians.”¹⁰⁹ Leith Samuel, of British Inter-Varsity, recalled similar dangers of the Oxford Group, which in the 1930s had encouraged him and many others to assume that impressions they received during the Quiet Time came from God. A person might receive impressions, Samuel said, but they might hail from sin or Satan himself. Consequently, he was wary of the common claim by the pious, “I felt led.” Nevertheless, he conceded that, on rare occasions, God seemed to have guided him through hunches or intuition.¹¹⁰ Coder, similarly, warned that because “evil spirits” could distort one’s “spiritual intuition,” Christians “must always keep this inner persuasion” of knowing God’s will “in subjection” to biblical, rational checks.¹¹¹

Mid-century evangelicals, perhaps reacting to Pentecostalism, generally maintained that a person should not expect to receive divine guidance through supernatural experiences such as dreams or visions.¹¹² Putting out “fleeces” received only tepid support. In this popular practice, the individual asked God for a specific sign, following the Old Testament story of Gideon.¹¹³ Weiss said that the “sign” method may have “broken down in effectiveness with Christians today” because many of those using it were “carnal,” having not yet entered into “the surrendered, spirit-filled life.”¹¹⁴ *Christian Life*’s Harper, however, said that fleeces were acceptable, if one obeyed their guidance.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Books, *Christian Life*, March 1952, 88.

¹¹⁰ Leith Samuel, “I felt led,” *HIS*, November 1954, 1-4.

¹¹¹ Coder, 78.

¹¹² *Ibid.*; Weiss, 43-44; Harper, 41.

¹¹³ Coder, 74.

¹¹⁴ Weiss, 98.

¹¹⁵ Harper, 41.

Instead of the miraculous, evangelicals looked for the providential. As Weiss elegantly put it:

The royal chain of God's divine plan for your life and mine is woven out of the single links which we lay hold of, one at a time, along the pathway of daily duty. After we have gathered enough of the links, the chain itself makes its appearance. The man who faithfully and prayerfully picks up the links formed in the forge of life's circumstances need never fear missing the entire golden chain.¹¹⁶

Specific links or providences might include, as Gustafson taught, “the people you meet, the demands of responsibility, events usual or unusual”;¹¹⁷ a missionary message that put a persistent burden for a particular country in one’s mind; rejection or acceptance from a mission board, university, or job. Receiving funds for one’s plans also could indicate God’s will, a driving conviction of faith missions. Coder insisted that God “can and will change every factor in a given situation if He wants us somewhere else than where we are,” adding that it was “impossible for God to call someone to do a work for Him without providing for every need and removing every obstacle.”¹¹⁸ All such circumstances could indicate “opened doors” to certain paths of service. They “alone are not always to be depended upon,” Gustafson said, “but God may use them to confirm your faith and trust in Him.”¹¹⁹

What role did family, church, and friends play in the individual’s decisions? Determining God’s will for one’s life was primarily an individual decision that rested entirely upon one’s personal relationship with Jesus. While youth were encouraged to seek wise counsel, Robert Cook cautioned, following Meyer, not to do so incessantly.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, YFC’s teenagers were advised to show respect for their parents’ wishes for

¹¹⁶ Weiss, 90.

¹¹⁷ Gustafson, letter to Missionary Promise Card signers, box 6, Folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

¹¹⁸ Coder, 76.

¹¹⁹ Gustafson, letter to Missionary Promise card signers, box 6, folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

¹²⁰ Cook, “How to Know the Will of God,” *YFC*, June 1945, 3.

career, schooling, and marriage—while continuing to pray for God’s will to triumph.¹²¹

Prospective missionaries understood that they would need approval by a mission board.

Coder taught that Christian service that forced a man to neglect his family was against God’s will.¹²² However, the widespread conviction that without the gospel people perished eternally kept duty to God paramount.

Ideally, the surrendered Christian would wait to act until clearly knowing God’s will;¹²³ realistically, modern mission boards, graduate schools, and employers needed decisions by set deadlines. Thus, a person should not sit idly, given that it was easier for God “to direct a moving vessel, but much harder to get a standing vessel in motion,” as Gustafson phrased it in his letters to Missionary Purpose/Promise cards. He suggested, “Study the fields of the world...read missionary surveys, missionaries’ prayer letters, hear missionary speakers whenever possible.” His follow-up procedure set discerning God’s will on a schedule, in part by correlating it to the academic year. For example, graduating seniors who had not responded to the IVCF mailings would receive their “final summons” by February 10th, when they likely were determining post-graduation plans.¹²⁴

Evangelicals thus combined rational, objective decision-making methods with the understanding that God still guided believers through mysterious, subjective ways. Despite this latter component, one of the most striking features of mid-century PLP was its high degree of epistemological certainty. Sterrett concluded *Therefore, Go*, as follows:

Every Christian has the guarantee that he may clearly know God’s will for his place of service if he is willing to do that will. The conviction of God’s will may come through different channels. These channels eventually, if not at first, will combine to give a settled conviction that God has spoken. If I am a Christian I must use the

¹²¹ See, for example, Youth Counsellor, *YFC*, May 1951.

¹²² Coder, 76.

¹²³ Weiss, 45.

¹²⁴ Gustafson, Follow-up Procedures, box 6, folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

means God has established in seeking His will. If I earnestly and intelligently seek God's will, I can be certain that He will direct me to His place of service for me.¹²⁵

Did this stem from a fundamentalistic demand for unwavering truth? Or a Common Sense understanding of knowledge? Or the influence of the corporate mindset? Or a reflection of the scientific worldview still prevalent in America? Most directly, the insistence upon certainty came from the belief that obeying God meant following His specific will for one's life, and God would not demand obedience without offering the knowledge needed to obey.¹²⁶ The providence component of PLP was not deterministic; believers were inclined to question or to stray from God's revealed will, eliciting frequent cautions such as "never change your mind" and "don't look back."¹²⁷ Wheaton's Edman warned, "immediately that there is knowledge of God's will for your life there will be opposition thereto...even good hearts and true may misinterpret God's will for you." Satan would beleaguer the faithful, too. "Suddenly, swiftly the adversary strikes to render us ineffective in God's service, and thus bring to an inglorious end the will of God for our life."¹²⁸

Those called to the mission field were especially at risk of transgressing God's perfect will, as YFC's Joseph bemoaned. Gustafson prepared those who signed the Missionary Purpose Card for trials to come:

You may be tempted to let the vision grow dim...discouragement may come from those who should encourage...attractive opportunities for serving the Lord may open up here at home...your course of training may involve you in years of preparation which will deflect you from your goal. But may I encourage you to persevere in the path of God's call, regardless of these distractions.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Sterrett, *Therefore, Go*, 13.

¹²⁶ Coder, 21-25.

¹²⁷ Robert Cook, *Now that I Believe*, 93; Harper, 41.

¹²⁸ Edman, 248.

¹²⁹ Gustafson, letter to Missionary Purpose Card signers, box 6, folder 6, IVCF Records, BGCA.

As the 1950s proceeded, the entire American missionary enterprise encountered more substantial roadblocks.

Challenges to the Missionary Call in the 1950s

The advance of Communism coincided with rising nationalism in Asia and Africa. In 1950, Communist-supporting church leaders in China labeled Anglo-American missionaries Western imperialists in “The Christian Manifesto,” which proved particularly damaging. The changing geo-political milieu halted missions advance, occasioning the need to “rethink the program of world evangelism,” as Woods put it at Urbana ’51. Youth leaders adapted missions-centered PLP to the international scene, as well as to other changes in American evangelicalism itself and the surrounding culture. The outcome, by the mid-1950s, seemed to be a greater expectation for the Holy Spirit to lead the individual directly.

While mission boards regrouped, affected missionaries began to reevaluate their lives’ very purpose. In February 1952 *HIS* featured a piece by recently-returned missionary Richard Webster, who described his “tested call.” Webster and his wife had departed China after only a three-year missionary term—had God not led them there in the first place? Explaining that he never had a special “vision” or other call experience, he decided to pursue missions based upon the need for the gospel in China, good physical health, and doors gradually opening after prayer. His reasons for leaving China were, number one, that foreigners now were an “embarrassment” to the Chinese church. Indeed, China was now a “closed country,” but God remained sovereign over the situation. Webster’s “tested” call, he concluded, did not signify his mistaken sense of guidance but God’s power and prerogative to open and close doors at will.¹³⁰

Dick Hillis, another China émigré, relocated to Formosa (now Taiwan) and founded Overseas Crusades (later, OC International). In “I was never called,” Hillis denied ever

¹³⁰ Richard Webster, “A Tested Call,” *HIS*, February 1952, 21-22.

receiving a momentous, divine call to China—in fact, he had an aversion to the country and the language. He had simply developed a concern for the country through prayer. As he saw it, his calling was not to a place but to the teaching profession, which used his spiritual gifts. “Learn what your gift is and where HE wants you to use it for His glory. Place yourself in God’s will to go or stay as His Spirit directs you into Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, the islands of the sea, or here at home. Let’s stop dreaming about a future call and start believing God and obeying Him.”¹³¹ YFC apparently reprinted the article in its 1955 special Missions Issue.¹³²

Adeney, also ousted from China, retook the reins of IVCF’s Missions Department in 1953 and directed Urbana ‘54. Alan Redpath, a Briton recently appointed as head pastor of Chicago’s Moody Church, presented the main address on the will of God, adapted from a booklet published in 1951 in the UK and then in 1954 in the US.¹³³ God’s “two-fold purpose” for the individual’s life, comprising character and career, included a task in God’s plan of world evangelization that only the individual could fulfill.¹³⁴ Discovering God’s will for one’s career depended entirely upon “accept[ing]” God’s will for one’s character.¹³⁵ Redpath’s realization that he should leave a lucrative corporate career for the ministry came after he abandoned his ambitions to God. His audience should not assume God wanted them to take the same path. “If anyone here can find any logical reasons to stay out of the ministry, stay out! The only people God wants in the ministry today are people who have such a compulsion of the Holy Spirit that they are desperate to get in, and do nothing else except go

¹³¹ Dick Hillis, “I Was Never Called,” *HIS*, March 1954, 27-28.

¹³² See “Coming Next Month,” *YFC*, February 1955. The March 1955 issue is missing.

¹³³ Alan Redpath, *Getting to the Know the Will of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1954 [orig. 1951]).

¹³⁴ This recalled Henry Drummond. See ch. 1, 30-31.

¹³⁵ Redpath, “Understanding the Will of God,” in *Changing World—Unchanging Christ* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1955), 27.

in obedience to what they believe to be the will of God.”¹³⁶ Despite his firm stance, Redpath offered minimal practical advice for discerning such a “compulsion.” He told students they simply needed to be “filled with the Holy Spirit,” which required emptying themselves, maintaining faith in God’s promises, and, finally, obeying whatever the Holy Spirit’s “inner voice” commanded.¹³⁷ Ultimately, he concluded, the individual needed a willingness to surrender to whatever God demanded, even if it required abandoning friendships and marriage prospects. The surrendered student should not expect to leave Urbana with a “clear blueprint” for the rest of life, but with “light enough for the next step.”¹³⁸

Redpath’s speech reflected his emphasis on the Deeper Life, which he helped renew among evangelicals by establishing the annual Mid-America Keswick week at Moody Bible Church in 1954.¹³⁹ Redpath was not the only Deeper Life advocate at Urbana. A.W. Tozer, the most well-known American representative, delivered the conference’s four morning Bible studies. The leading voice of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Tozer wrote widely-read devotional works, especially *The Pursuit of God* and a biography of A.B. Simpson, who founded the CMA and the Missionary Training Institute in Nyack, New York. According to Carpenter, Tozer was “nothing short of an evangelical prophet and mystic.”¹⁴⁰ Although closely related to the fundamentalist Victorious Life teaching, the Deeper Life teaching of Redpath and Tozer stressed inward, experiential piety over soul-winning performance. Following God’s will entailed the constant interplay between human and divine rather than the external pattern of one’s life—vocation, location, or marriage. At Urbana he referenced *The Praying Plumber*, his portrait of everyday submission to God’s

¹³⁶ Ibid., 28.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Robert Walker, “Some Mad, Some Glad,” *Christian Life*, November 1959, 20-21.

¹⁴⁰ Carpenter, 85. See also Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A.W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008).

will which he sketched from the life of a respected friend yet otherwise ordinary layperson.¹⁴¹ Above all, his messages stressed being indwelt by the Holy Spirit through continual “crisis encounters” with God. Such experiences were not brief steps on the path to finding God’s will; they *were* God’s will.¹⁴² In sum, neither Redpath nor Tozer conflated spiritual “surrender” with a missionary career, as corroborated in *HIS* magazine’s report on Urbana ‘54. Describing the theme of Redpath’s keynote as the “Spirit-controlled life,” the report captured the convention’s lasting effect by quoting one attendee, “I didn’t find *where* God wanted me to go, but I did find that a holy life is God’s first will for my life—later he’ll show me where.”¹⁴³

Following the Urbana ‘54 conference, Adeney released *The Unchanging Commission*, which maintained that worldwide revolution in no way obviated the church’s responsibility for world evangelization. But were all Christians required to sign up for the cause, or should only those specially led by experiences and circumstances go forward? Adeney said that both perspectives held some truth. On one hand, he insisted, “For those who are seeking to discover God’s plan for their lives, the first command to be obeyed is that which our Lord gave to His disciples: ‘Lift up your eyes and look on the fields.’”¹⁴⁴ On the other, he argued that the call to foreign missions was indeed special, necessitating a unique leading from the Holy Spirit. Beyond simply encouraging the church to keep missions central, Adeney urged Christians to keep PLP central to missions, especially in the face of Communism.

¹⁴¹ A.W. Tozer, “The Praying Plumber: A Sketch of God’s Dealings with Thomas Haire,” *Alliance Weekly*, January 6, 13, 20, 1954.

¹⁴² Ibid, “The Man Who Is Indwelt; The Man Who Comes Back From the Dead,” in *Changing World—Unchanging Christ*, 61-62, 65, 72.

¹⁴³ “Missionary Convention,” *HIS*, April 1955, 21.

¹⁴⁴ David Adeney, *The Unchanging Commission* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1955), 80.

Like numerous Anglo-American evangelical leaders, Adeney viewed Communism not simply as a political obstacle but a threat to the entire Christian worldview, including the belief that every individual had a unique purpose.¹⁴⁵ His discussion of the missionary call appeared in the chapter, “To Every Man His Work,” echoing Robert Speer’s 1901 essay of the same name.¹⁴⁶ his previous interactions with Communist students. “Before any decision can be made there must be a right attitude of mind. It is through our thinking that we discover the leading of the Holy Spirit.” In parallel, the communist student was “exhorted to ‘change his thinking’ and to ‘wash his brain,’ for the communist recognizes the immense importance of a right mental attitude.” This indoctrination process, ridding “every trace of the old way of thinking,” was “truly the devil’s counterfeit of a spiritual truth taught by the Apostle Paul, ‘Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God’ (Romans 12:2). Without this spiritual renewal the Christian is utterly incapable of making right decisions, for ‘to be carnally minded is death.’”

Recognizing the true Lordship of Christ required daily “surrender” to His will, not just a “vague desire to do the will of God” but a “burning desire to be in the place of God’s appointment”; anything else led to “self-deception and the destruction of any true spiritual effectiveness.” Communist students believed they would triumph, for they were ready “to sacrifice anything,” including extra money, any free time, and even their very lives. Given this example, Adeney warned, “Surely it is inconsistent to seek guidance in deciding on one’s life’s work or in choosing a life partner, while at the same time ignoring God’s leading in daily life and witness.” Any Christian who believed that making decisions independently

¹⁴⁵ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26-27.

¹⁴⁶ See ch. 1, 34.

of the “good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” demonstrated that the “mind [had] not been fully renewed by the Spirit.”

As Marxist revolution underscored every facet of the Communist lifestyle, a Christian’s work “should be integrated into God’s plan for world evangelization.” A truly devout Christian following the principles of Romans 12:1-2 need not worry about choosing a suitable job, as Adeney insisted, “If the Christian really believes that God has a definite work for each servant, he obviously will not think of choosing his own career.” God was the central planner of His earthly economy. “No confusion, no unemployment, no square pegs in round holes...our Master gives to every man his work.” The missionary calling was important; allowing God to guide it was more so.

“At Ease”? YFC after 1953

Bob Cook continued to stoke missionary fervor in YFC. His 1953 documentary, “Willing to Die,” featured the hymn, “I surrender all,” and highlighted what was happening in world evangelism, including YFC campaigns in Japan.¹⁴⁷ As the Korean War concluded, magazine covers touted patriotic themes. The 1953 Missions Issue printed another summons to the field by enthusiast Kenny Joseph, who bemoaned the significant absence of male mission recruits, which was a widely recognized problem. According to a study he cited, missionary women outnumbered men 13:1. The great, global battle against Satan’s army was being waged by evangelicalism’s regiment of “WACS” (Women’s Army Corp).¹⁴⁸

The 1954 Missions Issue, however, did not feature Joseph. Robert Cook spoke to the missionary call in a chapter from his forthcoming book, *It’s Tough to Be a Teenager* (1955). In “Career and/or Christ,” he defined a “call” as the following:

The deep inward conviction that God wants you to do something for Him—whether it is to go to Calcutta, or Chicago, or Caracas, or just next door to witness to your neighbor. The important thing is, it is something God is asking you to start doing

¹⁴⁷ “Launch New YFC Documentary,” *YFC*, February 1953, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph, “Where are the men?” *YFC*, March 1953, 30-31.

now, this minute. You will lose all the blessing of it if you delay obeying. God will never call you to be a missionary ten years from now without making you one today!

Similarly, “Full-Time Christian Service” was not restricted to a ministerial career but was “specific obedience, now, to the revealed will of God for you, by the enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, any person convinced they were aligned with God’s will could claim to be a full-time servant, regardless of occupation or location. All believers, regardless of career, shared three obligations—to glorify God, to tell the lost about Jesus, and to preach God’s Word. To discover a future career, one should determine which talents would be the best vehicles for accomplishing these objectives. “What are you good at? Mechanical drawing? Sports? Speech? Art? Whatever it is, make it pay for the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls.” Teenagers could pursue their natural ambitions, including a desire to make money, if they were “harnessed” to God’s will. “Career and/or Christ” followed the first chapter, “Can a Christian kid be popular?” and preceded chapters on parents, dating, and high school success. Had he departed from his urgent message in *Now that I Believe?*

In the 1950s, YFC leaders began to shift focus from the mass rallies to local high-school clubs. In 1953, headquarters moved from the heart of downtown Chicago—mere blocks away from IVCF—to suburban Wheaton, IL.¹⁵⁰ In 1954, the magazine received a makeover, introducing a sports section and more content dedicated to issues faced by the average American teenager. Questions answered in the “Youth Counsellor” column revealed teens’ persistent struggle to determine God’s will, not solely for their future lives but for their present leisure time. While the general prohibition of Hollywood movies remained, television posed an increasingly pertinent issue, as the percentage of American households

¹⁴⁹ Robert Cook, “Career and/or Christ,” *YFC*, March 1954, 25. Idem, *It’s Tough to be a Teen-Ager* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955).

¹⁵⁰ Hefley, *God Goes to High School*, 64.

owning a TV surged from 9% in 1950 to 90% in 1960.¹⁵¹ As early as January 1953, Youth Counsellor suggested, to a reader whose parents owned a set but forbade the cinema that “all barriers between what evangelicals know as separated living and worldly activity” had broken down. This demanded a “constant search for the guidance of God in all our affairs.”¹⁵² Mid-fifties articles regularly addressed “amusements,” as well as more controversial subjects such as the sensationalist Kinsey Reports on sexual behavior.¹⁵³ The November 1956 cover story, “What about Elvis Presley?” solicited readers’ opinions on the gyrating rock ‘n roll singer who had become a national sensation since appearing on the *Ed Sullivan* show in September. Featured responses were resoundingly negative, with one reader comparing her female classmates’ obsession with him to “heathen” idolatry. An accompanying article by conservative Baptist preacher William Ward Ayer bemoaned “Jungle madness in American music.”¹⁵⁴ Another article that year, “How far can a Christian go?” reminded teenagers that instead of asking how worldly was too worldly, they should strive to be as holy as possible.¹⁵⁵

Missionary Martyrs and Motivations

Against the increasing lure of the American good life, one 1956 event renewed the call to missionary self-denial: the death of five American missionaries to Ecuador, led by Wheaton College graduate Jim Elliot. YFC dedicated both its 1956 and 1957 Missions Issues to the incident. “Ecuador, a Year Later,” profiled the five widows, who had remained in

¹⁵¹ Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Pop Culture since 1830* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012), 330.

¹⁵² Youth Counsellor, YFC (January 1953), 20.

¹⁵³ Ed Darling, “20 Questions: Amusements,” YFC, August 1954, 4-5; “Christian Youth Answers Kinseyism,” YFC (April 1954), 35-38.

¹⁵⁴ “What about Elvis?”; William Ward Ayer, “Jungle Madness in American Music,” YFC, November 1956, 18-19.

¹⁵⁵ Warren Wiersbe, “How far can a Christian go?” YFC, August 1956, 6-7.

Ecuador to continue their late husbands' evangelistic work.¹⁵⁶ In the same issue, H.H. Savage's son Bob Savage, Vice President of YFC in South America, presented his method for settling God's will on missions. As with any other decision, whether who to date or what to preach on Sunday, individuals should heed "facts and circumstances," "[God's] Word," "peace in our hearts," and, finally, "an inner conviction...an 'inner voice' if you like."¹⁵⁷ For him, the facts about missionary need in South America had proven a wake-up call to the foreign field. On the opposite page were two compilations of statements by Graham and Cook over the years propounding the missionary imperative, including Graham's claim to know a church that, over four years, spent \$500,000 on a new building while only \$15,000 on foreign missions. Mel Larson, a YFC founding father and Evangelical Free Church in America missions executive, released *117 Ways to the Mission Field* in 1957, a collection of narratives of individual calls to foreign service. Comparing the testimonies to an advertising campaign for a consumer product, Larson promised young readers that they, too, could find a happy, unique path to the mission field.¹⁵⁸

While youth leaders tried to maintain students' interest in missions, mission boards tried to maintain their presence on the field. In October 1956, leaders met at Winona Lake for the fifth annual EFMA Mission Executives retreat to discuss strategy, including how to reduce "missionary wastage." Attendees reviewed recent data on missionaries' pre-field screening, preparation, and later success. Session leader A. Jack Dain, a Briton representing the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission in India, identified "spiritual immaturity" as the most common issue, and he proffered an explanation: Many lacked a "true missionary call from

¹⁵⁶ "Ecuador, a Year Later," *YFC*, March 1957, 10-13. The March 1956 issue is missing.

¹⁵⁷ Bob Savage, "How to Know God's Will on Missions," *YFC*, March 1957, 17-19.

¹⁵⁸ Mel Larson, *117 Ways to the Mission Field* (Moline, IL: Christian Service Foundation, 1957). See also Swanson, *Echoes of the Call*, 81-84.

God.” From Dain’s perspective, mission leaders should cease burdening all Christians with an emotional, corporate call and expect the Holy Spirit to set apart individual missionaries.¹⁵⁹

Sterrett, representing IVCF’s Missions Department, was present at the retreat, at a time when IVCF faced its own problems with missionary recruitment. Instead of a glut of spiritually immature candidates, the organization had witnessed a sharp decline in missionary interest. During the 1954-55 academic year, 849 cards arrived to the IVCF offices, with 376 indicating the signer’s purpose to be a foreign missionary. In other words, the number of explicit commitments to go overseas recorded at Urbana ‘51 exceeded (by nearly 150) the number of missionary commitments *of any kind* generated by students throughout IVCF during an entire academic year. The decline continued into academic year 1955-56, with only 594 cards—310 “Purpose” and 284 “Prayer”—arriving to the office.¹⁶⁰

In January 1957, IVCF’s Senior Staff Council reviewed the entire missionary program, including the cards. National Director Charlie Hummel, assigned the task of drafting a new version, summarized the actions taken in a March 1957 staff memo.

As you may remember, effective use of these cards is at an all-time low. Arising from this discussion was a unanimous decision that the card should be revised. Furthermore, it was suggested that they be combined so that henceforth there will be only one Missionary Purpose Card.

It was also recommended that the statement be reworded in terms primarily of a decision regarding commitment at the present time involving an earnest desire to seek God’s will, rather than a promise to go anywhere or do anything in the future.¹⁶¹

The new card, entitled “Missionary Decision Card,” asked students to select either the statement, “I believe it is god’s will for me to serve Him overseas,” or “I am uncertain

¹⁵⁹ A.J. Dain, “Screening of the Missionary Candidate,” in “Reports and findings of the 5th Annual Mission Executives’ Retreat,” Winona Lake, IN, Oct 2-5, 1956 (Washington, D.C.: EFMA, 1956), 51.

¹⁶⁰ “Missionary Decision Card Totals since 1950-51,” May 11, 1966, box 17, “Urbana: Statistics,” Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

¹⁶¹ Charles Hummel, memo to IVCF Staff, March 22, 1957, box 338, folder 4, IVCF Records.

and will seek God's guidance for my life-work and trust Him to reveal my responsibility, abroad or at home, in this world-wide mission of the Church."¹⁶² The inclusion of "or at home" was remarkable, as it evoked the ecumenical Student Volunteer Movement's revision of its own Purpose cards, which had coincided with the organization's liberalizing theology and declining evangelistic fervor.¹⁶³

On one hand, the sole Decision Card now urged all students to consider overseas missions. On the other, the wording may have diffused some of the pressure, in that its directive to seek God's will demanded neither visible action nor any serious consideration of foreign roles. Furthermore, the new card emptied the "going overseas" response of its volitional character: Either God had called the signer to foreign service or He had not. Consequently, the wording eased any pressure to sign up out of emotion or guilt. Instead, guilt would arise if a student dishonestly indicated a belief in God's leading. More students might receive informative literature from IVCF, while fewer, spiritually immature students might end up as missionary "wastage." Did the revised card work? Somewhat. The first academic year in use, 1956-57, witnessed a boost in submissions to 739, approximately 150 more than in the previous year. Of these, 299 students decided God's will for them was missions, while significantly more—440—decided to seek God's will regarding Christian service.¹⁶⁴

Urbana '57 recapitulated the call to sacrifice, through reference to the Auca martyrdom (as it was viewed) and the Communist cause. On New Year's Eve, the last night of the conference, Graham took the stage. Addressing "Missionary Commitment," he cited the New Testament's use of militant verbs such as "Fight. Wrestle. Run. Work. Suffer.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ "Student Volunteer Movement Conventions, 1947-55," Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, Box 14, BGCA.

¹⁶⁴ "Missionary Decision Card Totals since 1950-51," May 11, 1966, box 17, "Urbana: Statistics," Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

Endure. Resist. Agonize. Mortify,” which, to him, merited only one conclusion: “the Christian is a soldier who must suffer hardship.” It was not American GIs but Communist soldiers, he maintained, who were teaching the church a “great lesson” in “self-denial, discipline, dedication, and commitment...something of the things Christ taught us.” Quoting a university student who said he would “gladly die that Communism may be advanced one more mile,” Graham thundered: “Would you gladly die that Christ might be advanced one more mile in Africa? Five young men were willing to die last year that Christ might be taken to an Indian tribe in Ecuador—but what about you?!”¹⁶⁵

With the intensity of Graham’s address, one might have expected numerous students to fill out a Missionary Purpose card out of guilt alone. Yet, compared to the overwhelming response at Urbana ’51, the 1957 returns were disappointing. *HIS* omitted reference to the number of attendees who committed to go or to pray about missionary service. The 1957-58 school year boasted 1,702 total card submissions. Of those, 555 students indicated they intended to go overseas, while 1147 ticked the “seek God’s will” box. However, Urbana ’57 had grown to over 3,400 attendees, more than doubling the 1,646 who attended the 1951 conference, 987 of whom signed Purpose cards. Thus, even if all 555 students who committed to go overseas during the 1957-58 academic year signed those cards at the convention, the submissions dropped from 60% of attendees to 15.9%, or 987 to 555, signifying a drop in both relative and *absolute* numbers.¹⁶⁶

Life magazine’s coverage of the Auca incident elicited widespread public sympathy. Believers and nonbelievers sent letters variously committing to pray for the widows, to consider missionary service, or to reconsider the faith. In May 1957, Jim Elliot’s widow,

¹⁶⁵ Graham, “Missionary Commitment” (address, 1957 Urbana Convention, December 31, 1957). Audio available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/urbana.org/general_session_audio/urbana-57-billy-graham-missionary-commitment.mp3 (Accessed June 15, 2018).

¹⁶⁶ “Missionary Decision Card Totals since 1950-51,” May 11, 1966, box 17, “Urbana: Statistics,” Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

Elisabeth, released *Through Gates of Splendor*, which shared the men's last letters to base camp and their initial paths to Ecuador. Jim's attendance at Urbana '48, while president of the Wheaton College chapter of the Student Foreign Missions Fellowship, had confirmed his sense of calling to South America.¹⁶⁷ The young men's valorous surrender to God's will for the sake of the gospel, even to the point of death, was woven throughout the narrative. Claiming ignorance as to God's exact purposes, Elisabeth nevertheless maintained, "This was what God had planned."¹⁶⁸ As quoted in *Life*'s 1957 follow-up article, she said, "Death does not change my duty," and "Jim's death made me more conscious of the Aucas' need for Christ."¹⁶⁹ *Through Gates of Splendor* was an acclaimed bestseller. Although it did not immediately boost missionary recruitment, it became a classic depiction of missionary self-denial.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

The new evangelical youth ministries promulgated the maxim that God had a specific plan for each Christian's career, spouse, and overall life, and failure to find it doomed one to settle for God's "second best." Especially after World War II concluded, the objective need for missionaries shaped PLP, with the individual's calling couched in the general calling to evangelize the world. Certainty of God's plan was guaranteed through a spiritual transaction—surrendering one's will to receive knowledge. Nevertheless, there was no single authority on the discernment process, as various leaders often touted what had worked for them. External challenges to the American missionary enterprise, particularly the advance of Communism, reinvigorated the call to self-denial while also prompting a renewed

¹⁶⁷ Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1958), 18-19.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 252-53, 258.

¹⁶⁹ "The Widows Return to Teach in the Jungle," *Life*, May 20, 1957, 25-26.

¹⁷⁰ See Kathryn Long, "A Missionary Legend Takes Shape, 1956-59," Part I of *God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

dependence upon the Holy Spirit's unique, continual guidance of the individual. By 1957, Chicago-centered evangelical leaders recognized the intensifying allure of popular culture and the declining efficacy of traditional missionary appeals—even while the nation lauded missionary sacrifice anew. Elsewhere, another burgeoning youth movement adapted PLP to the postwar socio-political milieu. From an affluent, church-centered base in Hollywood, California, a female Christian educator mobilized her constituency to save both souls and civilization by first developing their leadership potential.

Chapter Three: Henrietta Mears: PLP for this Generation—and the Next

Chicago was not the only center of postwar evangelical PLP, nor were male leaders the only contributors. Some of the most significant streams of PLP and postwar evangelicalism, as a whole, sprang from a female Sunday School director in Southern California named Henrietta C. Mears (1898-1963).¹ Hailing from Minnesota, Mears was the product of a wealthy, high-society family known for Christian leadership and service in the Minneapolis Baptist church of William Bell Riley, founder of the World Christian Fundamentals Association. While working as a high-school chemistry teacher, Mears led an all-female Sunday School class in Riley's congregation that impressed Rev. Stewart MacLennan on his 1927 visit from the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, California. MacLennan soon offered her the job of Christian Education Director, which she eventually accepted. Although she headed to a Presbyterian congregation that had affirmed the five theological "Fundamentals" in 1923, the move symbolized her permanent break with the militant, muscular wing of American fundamentalism.² Arriving in sunny Southern

¹ Considering her vast influence on postwar evangelicalism, historians have given astonishingly little attention to Mears. The best sources are John G. Turner, "The Power Behind the Throne: Henrietta Mears and Post-World War II Evangelicalism," *Presbyterian Historical Society* 83, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 141-57; Arlin C. Migliazzo, "The Education of Henrietta Mears: A Fundamentalist in Transition," *Baptist History and Heritage* (Summer 2011): 65-76; Richard J. Leyda, "Henrietta Mears: Evangelical Entrepreneur," *Christian Educators Journal* 3, Vol 1., Iss.1 (2003), 64-65; and Jennifer Woodruff Tait, "Ambitious for God," *Christian History and Biography*, Issue 92 (Fall 2006), 30-32. Another helpful resource is Andrea V. B. Madden, "Henrietta Mears: Her Life and Influence, 1890-1963," M.A. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1997. Two somewhat hagiographical biographies written by associates, one during her life and the second three years following her death, are Barbara Hudson Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), and Ethel May Baldwin and David Benson, *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It* (Ventura, CA: G/L, Regal, 1966). The most comprehensive, recent biography is Earl A. Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003).

Archival sources were obtained at Gospel Light International's Ventura, CA, headquarters and included versions of her earliest Sunday School curricula such as the *God's Plan of the Ages* series discussed here, as well as a small, informal collection of Mears's personal papers, books, and ephemera. Except for a handful of letters, Mears did not save her correspondence, and her teaching notes and audio-taped speeches lack chronological and other contextual information. Since the author's research visit in 2014, GLINT has closed, and Mears's papers have been placed in storage, purportedly awaiting transfer to Azusa Pacific University. Other than GLINT, the Archives of Campus Crusade for Christ in Orlando, Florida, held one box of Mears-related material.

California in 1928, by 1933 Mears's Christian Education Department had exploded from approximately 450 to over 6,000 students, making it the nation's largest Sunday School and Hollywood Presbyterian the largest Presbyterian church. That year Mears founded Gospel Light Press to publish her own biblically robust, age-appropriate Sunday School curriculum for elementary through high-school students. By 1940 Presbyterian, Baptist, and even Assemblies of God Sunday Schools had purchased 1.7 million curriculum books published by the Press.³ When the National Sunday School Association was formed in 1946, she served as the only female curriculum adviser.

Her renown soon transcended Southern California and Christian Education circles, partly due to the 1953 publication of *What the Bible is All About*, her concise, lay Bible commentary adapted from her original high school curriculum. With two million copies in print by its 1966 re-release, the text became a modern classic of popular evangelical literature. Billy Graham, her most famous mentee, soon distributed it through his evangelistic association.⁴ In 1957 *Christian Life* interviewed her as one of the most influential evangelical leaders of the day.⁵ Her massive Christian Education Department epitomized the decade's suburban church growth and the postwar baby boom that nourished it. Her specialty, however, was not little children. During the 35 years she taught Hollywood Presbyterian's College Department, a Sunday School group for university students, she prepared over 400 future ministers, missionaries, and lay Christian leaders. Mears, memorialized as postwar evangelicalism's "power behind the throne," drew strength from her trust in God's providence.⁶

² Migliazzo, "The Education of Henrietta Mears: A Fundamentalist in Transition," 75, n. 1, and passim. On Riley, see William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

³ Script for play based on Gospel Light's founding, ca. 1940, Gospel Light Archives, Ventura, CA (hereafter, GLA).

⁴ Henrietta C. Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 1966 [orig. 1953]).

⁵ Robert Walker, "The Life that Wins," *Christian Life* (July 1957), 18-20.

As even a brief overview of her life and publications reveals, PLP colored Mears's ministry from its start. While teaching in Riley's Minneapolis church, she drafted her own "Ten Commandments for the Sunday School Teacher." Commandment Three stated, "I will seek to help each [student] discover the will of God, because the Master can use every talent." In Hollywood, she extended this concern for God's plan for the individual student to His sovereignty over all human history, as exemplified by one of Gospel Light's first curriculum series, *God's Plan of the Ages*, re-released thrice (1940, 1951, 1959) during Mears's lifetime after its 1934 debut. She taught Psalm 37:5 ("Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass") as her "all-inclusive and limitless" verse.⁷ Drawing upon another of her favorite passages, Ephesians 1, she stressed God's sovereignty over daily life, which meant submitting to Jesus as Lord of one's life-plans by praying, along with the Apostle Paul, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"⁸

PLP grounded her philosophy of Christian education. As she maintained in one of her signature addresses, the Christian educator's consummate task was to assist young adults to see that "*God has a blueprint for their lives*" because the "most important thing for a Christian youth to discover is the plan of God for his life."⁹ Bible scholar Wilbur Smith, writing from the recently founded neo-evangelical Fuller Theological Seminary in nearby Pasadena, wrote to Mears in April 1948. He inquired, somewhat incredulously, how she kept her successful program Christ-centered. Mears replied that her department's mission was to relate Christ to all aspects of young adults' lives—their education, vocation, employment, life partner—ultimately, "where to invest their lives in this modern world." She maintained,

⁶ Turner, "Power Behind the Throne," 151. Turner's research is the chief scholarly source situating her within the wider milieu of postwar evangelicalism and American culture.

⁷ Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story*, 70-71.

⁸ Mears protégé Bill Bright recalled the gravitas with which she taught this. See Bright, *Come Help Change the World* (Peachtree City, GA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1999), 24.

⁹ Henrietta Mears, "Who Are the Young People You Teach?" in *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It!* ed. Baldwin and Benson, 329. This is one of four representative addresses appended to this biography. Although undated, skeletal outlines of the core content are scattered throughout her papers in the Gospel Light Archives.

Youth does not think into the future far enough therefore we must encourage them to dream of great tomorrows. Youth must know that God has a blueprint for each life. If so, he must find his own and build according to specifications. What is more exciting than searching for the divine plan in one's life? What can give greater satisfaction than a sense of building according to that plan? I have seen young people do this by the hundreds. It is not easy to accomplish but it is thrilling in experience.¹⁰

Far beyond merely emphasizing God's plan, she definitively shaped postwar-evangelical PLP in the following ways: First, she made it central to Christian leadership. Second, she increasingly elevated the Holy Spirit's role in revealing God's plan. Third, she reached especially influential audiences—university students, Hollywood celebrities, and Baby Boomer youth—with a sanguine, inspiring, culturally relevant take on PLP. Her legacy to postwar evangelical PLP traced its origins to 1947, when she returned from a year-long overseas tour. Although this was her fifth international voyage, the nine months in South America and three in Europe were the most career-defining, as the next section will show.¹¹

PLP in Mears's Piety: Her 1946-47 World Tour and Global Vision

In February 1946, Mears and her sister, Margaret, departed from Los Angeles for a year of international travel. The war years had taken their toll on the 55-year-old's physical and emotional health, as she maintained the College Department despite losing hundreds of her "boys" to the military (73 out of 412 College Department members had enlisted by April 1942).¹² Officially on leave from church duties, her priorities were rest and reflection, as well as a fair bit of fine dining and shopping. The brief daily entries in her travel journal illuminated the trip's restorative effects, as well her evangelical piety centered upon divine guidance. On Day 1 she concluded her entry by alluding to Psalm 37:23: "'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.' May this be true through the entire year as we journey on."¹³ Though she included direct biblical quotations in only about 20 entries, the selections

¹⁰ Mears to Wilbur Smith, May 2, 1948, Wilbur Smith Papers, Fuller Seminary Archives.

¹¹ Mears, "Early Recollections," Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

¹² Annual Report, Hollywood Presbyterian Christian Education Dept., April 1942, GLA.

overwhelmingly came from PLP-related scriptures, particularly verses 5 and 23 of Psalm 37.¹⁴ Perhaps the trip's spontaneity explained the frequent appeals to God's direction. The duo only had purchased tickets to Mexico and South America in advance, leaving each weekly itinerary largely up to whim—and providence. Their unknown path provided a spiritual journey, literally and metaphorically. In Mexico City on March 16, 1946, she again quoted Psalm 37:5 and observed, "It is wonderful to know that the Lord is directing our path. We are out on a long journey and don't know just what we ought to do but our Loving Father does!"¹⁵

Divine leading aside, the Mears sisters already benefited from several providential circumstances—namely inherited wealth, social connections, and American passports.¹⁶ By regularly staying in luxury hotels in cosmopolitan cities, sailing on upper-class ships, and taking spontaneous day trips, the duo expanded their international network. In Mexico and Ecuador, they visited American faith missions organization Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Central American Mission, and gospel radio station HCJB.¹⁷ For HCJB she gave several radio talks, including her signature call to Christian service, "Lord, what [wilt thou] have me

¹³ Mears, diary entry of February 17, 1946, GLA.

¹⁴ For additional references to PLP verses not mentioned below, see entries from February 19, March 3, March 21, June 8, and October 23, 1946.

¹⁵ Mears, diary entry of March 16, 1946, GLA.

¹⁶ The source of the family's wealth was banking and printing.

¹⁷ See diary entries from March and April 1946. Faith missions operated independently from the hegemonic Baptist and Presbyterian mission boards, following the conviction that God called and funded workers, who would be qualified based on their evangelistic enthusiasm and piety rather than seminary education. Early twentieth-century American faith missions, such as Wycliffe, the Central American Mission, and HCJB, typically recruited workers from the fundamentalist Bible Institutes and rejected the mainline denominational boards' embrace of the social gospel, liberal theology, and "worldly" management methods. See William Svelmoe, *A New Vision for Missions: William Cameron Townsend, The Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Culture of Early Evangelical Faith Missions, 1917-1945* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 58-73. See also Joel Carpenter, "The Propagation of the Faith Once Delivered: The Fundamentalist Foreign Missionary Enterprise," in Carpenter and Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals for Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 92-132. The fact that Mears, whose denomination underwrote a major mission board, visited these faith missions displayed her broad evangelical associations, as well as her supreme concern for evangelism over the Social Gospel.

do?”¹⁸ At each destination she attended local Protestant churches—some led by Americans using the Gospel Light curriculum—and observed the youth ministries. She reacted viscerally to the indigenous religious situation, characterizing it as a mixture of ritualistic, antagonistic Catholicism and pagan superstition devoid of the biblical gospel.¹⁹ Yet she was no dour, separatist fundamentalist, as the trip clearly demonstrated. Although she personally refused to smoke, drink alcohol, or dance, during many evenings she mingled with those who did.²⁰ She shopped at high-class boutiques and even viewed new Hollywood releases at the movie theatres. In addition to these “worldly” activities, one particular engagement confirmed her support for mainline Presbyterian leaders. In Rio de Janeiro she arranged a dinner with a visiting friend, Dr. John Mackay, Scottish-born Presbyterian theologian and recently appointed President of Princeton Theological Seminary, and his wife. Despite its negative reputation among fundamentalists, it was the nation’s most prestigious Presbyterian seminary, and she directed her seminary-bound “boys” to attend it instead of conservative rival Westminster Theological Seminary. After conversing with Mackay, she tellingly remarked, “[He] is the greatest exponent of evangelical Christianity in the world today.”²¹

As she networked, Mears closely followed socio-political developments, watching the evening newsreels in hotel lobbies and discussing the growing threats of atomic warfare and Communism with other travelers. When Dwight Eisenhower visited Rio de Janeiro in August, she attended his speech and the American-only reception, where she dined on hot dogs and Coca-Cola and met the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil.²² Her immediate surroundings

¹⁸ Mears, diary entry of 27 April 1946.

¹⁹ Idem, diary entry of April 3, 1946. She described the missionary situation as “hopeless,” saying that the locals were “filled with superstition and the Catholic Church keeps them gross ignorance.”

²⁰ Idem, diary entry of June 22, 1946.

²¹ Idem, diary entries of August 11 and 20, 1946. On MacKay’s and Princeton’s rocky relationship to fundamentalists in the 1940s, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 23, 116, and passim.

²² Mears, diary entries of August 7-8, 1946.

provided her with a sense of wealth disparities and contemporary youth culture outside of the U.S. When Rio's university students began rioting over the high cost of living by looting and damaging local shops, she wrote, "Youth 'out of bounds' is a dangerous enemy."²³ Instilling Christian faith, especially in the young, was the ultimate answer to social unrest. Although this was a commonly held belief among mid-century evangelicals, for her, it specifically applied to PLP.

While still in Rio in September, she paused to reflect on her own calling:

I am weighing the matter of the future carefully as far as my work and the business is concerned. *It is good to get away and get a perspective. The world is in such a mess and time is short that I want to be useful as long as I can be. I want to live up to capacity. I want to live in high gear. I'm so glad that the Lord has a definite place for me. My only concern is that I shall be in His absolute will.*²⁴

At the time, Mears was trying to get to Europe. Her entries from spring and summer variously mentioned putting South Africa, Palestine, and Europe on the itinerary but recorded no serious plans. During extended stays in both Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, however, she encountered several European refugees who had lost family and property to the German occupation but were eagerly preparing to return now that voyages to the continent had resumed. Then in late summer, after reading that American officials were heading to Europe, she began pestering the tourist bureau about possible voyages and the United States consulate about passport extensions.²⁵ She had no luck until October, when the R.M.S. *Queen Mary* sold the sisters two tickets for a voyage later that month. Once again, the American consulate denied their request for civilian travel to Europe. After Margaret demanded to speak to the "highest in authority," the American Ambassador sympathized with the case presented: Since 700 men from Hollywood Presbyterian had served during the

²³ Mears, diary entry of August 31, 1946.

²⁴ Idem, diary entry of September 10, 1946.

²⁵ Idem, "Early Recollections," Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

war, it was imperative for Mears to understand what the survivors had witnessed.²⁶ Watching evening news reels of the Nuremberg Trials in her hotel lobby, she wrote, “I have waited on the Lord to reveal His perfect will to us in all this matter about going to Europe. I want nothing but that. He can overrule any decision of any court so all is in His hands.”²⁷ After a flurry of phone calls and “quite a bit of talk” in the Embassy, on October 16th, the Consul granted the sisters’ wishes. Ten days later they set sail on the *Queen Mary*.²⁸

While on board, she spoke with fellow passengers about the current political climate. Like numerous evangelicals, she interpreted events through the lens of dispensational premillennialism, and in one entry reported spending the evening reading what “Ezekiel says about Russia,” then exclaiming, “The Bible is a record of history that hasn’t happened yet!”²⁹ Docking in France on November 17th, the sisters moved briskly over the following three months through Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and back to France. They witnessed shocking conditions: bomb-flattened city squares, food rationing, fuel shortages, soaring inflation, a pervasive black market, beggars, starvation—all contributing to social desperation. She talked with victims of Nazi Germany, including concentration-camp survivors. Compared to previous visits, the tarnished cosmopolitan beauty and “slovenly” service were staggering,³⁰ as she later put it, the glittering “ice castle of minarets and parapets” had “melted into mush.”³¹ Her diary entries frequently noted the paucity of raw materials, manpower, and even motivation to rebuild. As in South America, she visited

²⁶ Ibid. See also Baldwin and Benson, *Henrietta Mears and How She Did It*, 226.

²⁷ Mears, diary entry of October 14, 1946.

²⁸ See also Madden, 91-94.

²⁹ Mears, diary entry of November 8, 1946. Until the U.S. allied with Russia during World War II, fundamentalists assumed that Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 prophesied Russia’s end-times antagonism of God’s people. Once the Cold War began, the belief rebounded. See Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 224-230, 281, 293-325.

³⁰ Mears, diary entry of February 6, 1946, written from Paris.

³¹ Idem, “Early Recollections,” Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

American missionaries and national workers, listening intently to their gripping stories, and even donating five months' salary to one pastoral family. Celebrating the new year in Nice, France, she wrote, "I thank God especially, today, that I am an American. There is no country in the world like ours. How terrible it is that we have left God out when HE has favored us so above our fellows. I want this new year to be one guided of the Lord. He knows the way I should go! All I wish is His perfect will."³²

In subsequent weeks, Mears meditated on what Europe's destruction meant for Western civilization and for the American churches. In reports to her Hollywood colleagues, she blamed the nineteenth-century turn to rationalism and relativism. Once leaders began to deify man rather than Christ, totalitarianism and war became inevitable, as God "brought punishment on the nations" for their unbelief. Yet America was not immune to the same fate, she worried, given the growth of secularism among its intellectual and political elite.³³ While voyaging across the Atlantic to New York, she studied the biblical story of Esther, the Hebrew queen who used her influence upon the king to save her people from destruction, resolving, "If I perish, I perish." Perhaps, like Esther, Mears had been raised up "for such a time as this."³⁴

Leadership for Such a Time as This: The 1947 Forest Home Awakening

Seeing Europe in 1947 similarly affected another rising evangelical leader, Harold J. Ockenga. As pastor of Boston's Park Street Church, in 1942 and 1943 Ockenga spearheaded the launch of the National Association of Evangelicals, the cross-denominational, theologically conservative lobby and first official institution of postwar American

³² Mears, diary entry of January 1, 1947.

³³ Roe, 275-77. According to this biography, Mears recorded these impressions in "early 1947" while in "Germany." This is mistaken, though, since the trip diary shows that the sisters, much to their dismay, never made it to Germany due to a missed chance to buy tickets. See Mears, diary entry of January 15, 1946.

³⁴ Mears, "Early Recollections," Mears Audio Archive. See also Roe, 278.

evangelicalism.³⁵ In late summer 1947—that is, months after Mears’s return—Ockenga joined a U.S. Government convoy to survey the war destruction.³⁶ The experience inspired his opening convocation address to the first class of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, over which he served as President in Absentia. Delivered on 1 October 1947, Ockenga’s speech is widely recognized as the debut call for a “new evangelicalism” that would repudiate fundamentalist separatism in favor of cultural engagement.³⁷ Fuller Seminary proposed to train Christian leaders to meet the uncertain postwar milieu, in which, as Ockenga warned, “the same processes that brought Europe down are at work in America today.” Even considering the popularity of this interpretation among fundamentalists, it is uncanny how closely his phrasing, examples, and analysis echo Mears’s earlier reports to Hollywood Presbyterian.³⁸ Ockenga even concluded by quoting Esther 4:14.

It is unclear how closely Mears and Ockenga interacted in summer 1947, when two Hollywood Presbyterian mentees enrolled in the seminary’s first class.³⁹ In any case, she was more than a female supporter of an essentially male-led mission; rather, she envisioned and established her own initiatives for postwar Christian leadership. On June 24, 1947, over three months prior to Ockenga’s speech, Mears addressed the annual Gospel Light Teacher Training conference at Forest Home, the San Bernardino Christian conference center and campgrounds she had established ten years prior. Gravely recounting her impressions from Europe, she declared, “There is no mystery as to what happened in Germany. It can all be

³⁵ For Ockenga’s role in establishing the National Association of Evangelicals, see Garth Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 91-103.

³⁶ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

³⁸ See Ockenga, excerpts from opening address to Fuller Seminary, October 1, 1947, as it appeared in the first Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary. Available at <http://fuller.edu/about/history-and-facts/harold-john-ockenga>. (Accessed 19 Oct 2016.)

³⁹ In December 1950, Ockenga wrote Mears to express the “cherished plan in [his] heart” for her to be “actively identified with Fuller.” Ockenga to Mears, December 29, 1950, GLA. Mears declined an invitation to head Fuller’s Christian Education Department. On her early connections to the seminary, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 54, 89-90.

traced step by step. And the same is happening in America today.” To avert World War III, Christians must develop “an answer to Communism” and “make disciples of all nations.” During the war a class of soldiers deemed “expendables” undertook particularly dangerous missions; now, Mears declared, “We must be expendables for Christ.”⁴⁰

That night, during a prayer session in her cabin, she and four young men shared a collective burden for evangelizing unreached peoples around the world, particularly college students. By the next morning a loose association devoted to campus evangelism had formed.⁴¹ Calling themselves the “Fellowship of the Burning Heart,” the group signed a statement of four discipleship commitments, as follows: First, to abide in Christ through a “disciplined devotional life” consisting of “one continuous, daily hour of prayer, Bible study, and devotional reading”; second, to build “Christian character” marked by “holy living,” “self-denial,” “self-discipline,” “chastity,” and “virtue”; third, to bring at least “one soul to Christ per year,” recognizing that discipleship “exercises itself primarily in winning the lost for Christ”; and, fourth, to pursue “absolute consecration,” so that “God’s perfect will finds expression” in one’s body. As part of this, the Fellowship members pledged to be “expendable for Christ.”⁴²

Then Mears and her colleagues began organizing a national conference to be held at Forest Home in two months. A promotional brochure mailed nationwide proclaimed, “GOD HAS SPOKEN” and “The revival has come.” Directly quoting Acts 2.17—that is, in the “last days” the Holy Spirit would produce a revival in which “sons and daughters” would “prophesy”—the text recounted the “night of June 24th,” when the “Holy Spirit spoke to a small group” and imparted a vision for worldwide evangelism, “filling them with the power of the Spirit in a manner not unlike the experience of the disciples at Pentecost.” A revival

⁴⁰ Benson, 230-31.

⁴¹ Benson, 231-232; Roe, 280-84.

⁴² “Fellowship of the Burning Heart,” founding statement, CRUA. The name derived from John Calvin’s seal depicting a heart on fire for God.

that might prevent the “annihilation of civilization” was at hand. Following the student volunteers led by Dwight L. Moody, today’s youth must answer the “call to arms” to win a “militant, pagan world” to Christ. In addition to the main program themes of “evangelism,” “spiritual growth” and “service,” special topics included “personal habits,” “discipline,” and “technique of devotions.”⁴³ Invitations mailed to hundreds of university students and evangelical leaders demonstrated PLP’s central role in Mears’s vision for Christian leadership. Resembling a draft notice from Uncle Sam, a sample letter read,

I need you and God needs you! I have come back from Europe and South America with an overwhelming sense of the crisis hour in which we live. The needs of the world are appalling. I believe...that you are a young man of destiny, for who knows but that ‘you have come into the kingdom for just such a time as this.’ I believe God has made no mistake and that He has a plan for you in this hour. God is calling for expendables.⁴⁴

In person, Mears was no less bold. War veteran Gary Demarest, who had recently graduated from UC-Berkeley, encountered the dynamo that summer at the annual Mount Hermon Bible conference. She introduced herself, “Young man! Do you know that God has a wonderful plan for your life? I want you to come to a special conference for college students in a few weeks.” Though shell-shocked, he agreed—unaware, of course, that over the following decade thousands of university students would hear that God had a wonderful plan for their lives, too.⁴⁵

600 students from 87 universities attended the 1947 College Briefing Conference, held from 30 August to 6 September at Forest Home.⁴⁶ Reflecting on the week in promotions for the 1948 conference, Halverson explained that the organizers decided to forgo a regimented schedule to allow the Holy Spirit to guide proceedings. The week began at

⁴³ “God Has Spoken,” 1947 College Briefing Conference brochure, CRUA.

⁴⁴ Roe, 287. I could not find these letters in the Gospel Light or CRUA.

⁴⁵ Gary Demarest, “We Called Her Teacher,” *Presbyterians for Renewal*, December 1998, 10. Demarest, who later founded the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, confirmed the story in an interview with Turner, 156, n. 31.

⁴⁶ Baldwin and Benson, 242-48; Roe, 292-96. See also “God has spoken,” 1947 CBC brochure, GLA.

“Victory Circle,” a campfire spot where students voluntarily stood to dedicate themselves to Christ and to “surrender” any sins hindering their “victory,” throwing a stick into the fire to symbolize their commitment. Though Halverson anticipated the activity lasting 45 minutes, the confessions and commitments ran over three hours every night. According to other testimonies, the 1947 conference challenged attendees to practice the Fellowship of the Burning Heart’s disciplines, to initiate personal evangelism, and to reconsider their future plans.⁴⁷ Hanging a world map in the assembly hall, Mears told students to write their name on the spot where God wanted them to go, whether in a far corner of the world or on their own campus. If they were unsure, they could mark a country to pray for and to consider serving in the future. One brave student placed his name over Russia and, when pressed by a skeptical Mears two years later, reminded her, “you said that God never changes his vision, and that’s where God told me to go.”⁴⁸

In the years after 1947 Forest Home hosted a yearly College Briefing Conference for undergraduate leaders nationwide, featuring the usual conference fare of inspirational evening messages, Bible teaching, and specialized training, as well as ample time for personal consultations with individual speakers. The first few conferences maintained a serious tone, as Mears desired, and in 1948 attendees observed a daily, thirty-minute “Discipline of Silence.”⁴⁹ That year’s conference brochure proclaimed, “The time has come for INVASION on college campuses.” Because the time was “too short...to urge those who are not ready for complete abandon to the will of God,” the organizers sought only those students who were “fearless in their discipleship, willing to pay whatever price Jesus Christ

⁴⁷ See student testimonies, quoted in “Spirit of the 1947 College Briefing Conference Lives On,” *Fellowship of the Burning Heart* 1, no. 7 (August 1948), CRUA.

⁴⁸ Mears, “Qualifications of Leadership” (address to 1959 Philadelphia Sunday School Convention), Mears Audio Archive, n.d. See also Demarest, 10. Mears’s student, Dave Benson, founded Russia for Christ and co-authored the 1966 biography of her.

⁴⁹ 1948 College Briefing Conference program, CRUA.

demands to carry out His program in the world.”⁵⁰ As the 1949 promotional brochure warned, the “sands of time [were] fast running out” for a world held captive to “darkness” and “agnosticism.” Fortunately, the “thrilling signs of a great spiritual awakening” unseen “since the days of Finney and Moody” were at hand. In light of these “facts,” the conference intended to “challenge, train and prepare college age young people in this crisis hour. Through the guidance of the H[oly] S[pirit] working through outstanding Christian leaders every individual will have ample opportunity to discern God’s will for his life in these days. It is desired that only those come who are vitally concerned with this matter.”⁵¹ Forest Home, especially Victory Circle, became “holy ground” for students seeking the fateful “mountaintop experience” that would reveal God’s plan for them.⁵²

The 1949 CBC welcomed Billy Graham to speak about knowing God’s will.⁵³ Regarding the Bible, he exhorted students to “learn it,” “memorize it,” and “digest it,”⁵⁴ even though he himself was still wrestling with internal doubts over its authority. In his account of this crisis of faith, his doubts climaxed mid-week, prompting him to seek counsel from Mears and another conference speaker, the eminent revival enthusiast J. Edwin Orr (1912-1987).⁵⁵ Alone in the woods, Graham pledged to accept the Bible as God’s Word and asked to be filled with the Holy Spirit’s power and authority to proclaim it to others.⁵⁶ He then gave

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “There is Only One Adequate Answer,” 1949 College Briefing Conference promotional brochure, CRUA.

⁵² Student testimonies, quoted in “Spirit of the 1947 College Briefing Conference Lives On,” CRUA.

⁵³ Bill and Vonette Bright’s personal notebook from the conference appears to be the only archival record of each day’s lectures. CRU Archives.

⁵⁴ Billy Graham, “How to Know God’s Will” (address to College Briefing Conference, September 4, 1949), as quoted in Bill and Vonette Bright’s personal notes from that year’s conference, CRUA.

⁵⁵ For Orr’s midcentury influence on American evangelicalism, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 221-31. See also J. Edwin Orr, *Good News in Bad Times: Signs of Revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953).

a second talk at the CBC, after which 400 of the 1,000 attendees rededicated their lives to serving Christ.⁵⁷ “Service,” that year’s third official theme after “spiritual life” and “revival,” covered church, personal, and campus evangelism, alongside the “missionary outlook.” While certainly important, recruiting foreign missionaries was not the CBC’s sole objective, one feature distinguishing it from the parallel inauguration of InterVarsity’s Urbana conventions. Unlike Urbana, too, only a handful of archival materials remain from the CBC’s first decade, and no speech compendia were published. While such content would enrich the study of PLP, Urbana’s attendance, complexity, and institutional influence dwarfed the CBC.

The early Briefing Conferences spurred a flurry of activity within HPC’s College Department and short-term, evangelistic Deputation Teams. From December 1947 to December 1948 the Department grew from 689 to 862 members.⁵⁸ Aping Communist strategies, students canvassed their universities in three-person prayer “triangles,” seeking a fourth convert; triangles then multiplied into prayer “cells.”⁵⁹ On “Gospel Bomb Day” in April 1948, 100,000 tracts were “dropped” onto numerous campuses.⁶⁰ Mears welcomed guest speakers to help her students obtain their individual marching orders. Orr addressed the Deputation Teams in 1949 on “How to Find God’s Plan for One’s Life,” his talk adapting

⁵⁶ Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 137-38. See also, Powers, 184-85. Grant Wacker does not cover Forest Home’s and Mears’s role in resolving Graham’s crisis of faith but does note that in his early ministry he willingly placed himself under the spiritual authority of Mears, even though it was highly atypical for evangelical men to do so. See Wacker, *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 139.

⁵⁷ Powers, 185; Roe, 303. According to the Brights’ personal notes from Graham’s next talk after the lecture on knowing God’s will may have been this one, as its theme was “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” and included dozens of scripture passages.

⁵⁸ Annual Report, HPC Christian Education Department, December 1948; Annual Report, April-December 1947, GLA.

⁵⁹ Mears, “Winning Youth for Christ,” transcript of address to 1952 Teacher’s Training Conference, n.d., GLA. The goals of the 1948 conference were the “Enlistment” of student evangelists, followed by “Tactical: Planting the Cross on college campuses through militant, self-perpetuating cells of Christian youth.” See 1948 College Briefing Conference Brochure, GLA.

⁶⁰ “Retrospect,” in 1948 College Briefing Conference brochure, CRUA.

classic guidance illustrations to students reconsidering their callings after the Forest Home experience. It was possible, he said, for an individual to have “absolutely clear guidance to engage in a certain calling” but later receive conflicting directions. He pointed to his own life, when, as a young man he followed a missionary call that led him overseas with the China Inland Mission. But shortly after he arrived, God “seemed to change the call,” redirecting him to a “ministry of spiritual awakening of Christians around the world.” Hearing this second call, however, required having followed the first, even if it meant, in his case, spending only three months in China. Contributing yet another maritime metaphor to evangelical PLP, he pictured a sailor standing on deck of a ship that was progressing steadily toward the guiding lights of the shore, when suddenly the captain steered off course, awaiting friendlier conditions.⁶¹

Mears considered college students, “men and women of destiny,” one of—if not *the*—most important, influential demographic groups in the postwar church. Like the war veterans who attended the 1947 conference, collegians possessed the maturity, vision, and drive to answer the world’s needs.⁶² Mears possessed little tolerance for students who neglected their work in hopes of the Lord’s imminent return—this was “nonsense.” Performing God’s work well demanded all the education one could get, since the “sharper the tool, the finer the cutting.”⁶³ Throughout the fifties Mears spoke frequently on leadership to Sunday School teachers nationwide, many drawn from the college population. In various addresses she described qualified leaders as purposeful, knowledgeable, cultured, courageous, and ambitious. They should be attractive in personality, as well as in dress and grooming, the better to leave a lasting, positive impression on others.⁶⁴ In one speech, she

⁶¹ Orr, *The Inside Story of the Hollywood Christian Group* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955), 28.

⁶² Mears, “College Department,” Reel 30, Mears Audio Archive, Gospel Light Archives.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

portrayed Jesus himself as the “ideal leader,” exuding strength, vitality, and the most effective gifts for influencing people.⁶⁵ Developing Christian leaders was her passion, and this required one non-negotiable qualification—being male.

Mears and Gender

Mears took a firm stance on gender roles. She taught that the Bible commanded patriarchal authority in the church, and Jesus himself had “ordained men” to lead when he chose his twelve disciples. She therefore insisted that the College Department’s President be male, while establishing the office of female Vice President over the girls. To her this policy was not only biblical but strategic; if she could “get the men, the ladies will come too!”⁶⁶ In talks to other Christian educators she insisted that a woman should “seldom” to “absolutely never” lead a college department, or even assume up-front duties, for fear of intimidating the male visitors, whom she knew would be far outnumbered by women in most evangelical circles.⁶⁷ Throughout the year she checked the Hollywood Presbyterian attendance records to verify the Sunday School had a balanced male-female ratio.⁶⁸ Save for one exception, she maintained her stance against female leaders, even when the mass exodus of laymen to the military drove some evangelical churches to delegate some “male” responsibilities to women.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, she exhorted her female students to support male headship, convinced that if strong men took the reins women would have plenty of work to do. Although she

⁶⁴ Representative talks to Christian educators include “Qualifications of a Leader,” Reel 36, and “Personality,” Reel 8, Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

⁶⁵ Mears, “Dimensions of Leadership,” Benson and Baldwin, 335-43.

⁶⁶ Powers, 135.

⁶⁷ Mears, “Teaching College-Age Youth,” *Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education*, ed. J. Edward Hakes (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 224; Mears, “College Department,” Reel 30, GLA. See also Mears, “How to Build a College Department” (transcript, address to Fuller Seminary Presbyterian Fellowship, n.d., 1954), 10-11, GLA.

⁶⁸ Roe, 197-98.

⁶⁹ Mears, “College Department,” Reel 30, Mears Audio Archive, GLA, and Roe, 198-99. On evangelical women’s roles during World War II, see Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 89-96, esp. 92, 95.

welcomed hundreds of women to the College Briefing Conferences, she preferred to nurture Christian wives over single female missionaries.⁷⁰ Echoing postwar evangelical rhetoric, she upheld the Christian household as the foundational institution in the church and society.⁷¹ As one application of this, she advised engaged women who suddenly sensed a missionary call to proceed with marriage, trusting God to call both spouses to the field if it was His plan.⁷²

The inconsistency between Mears's official gender stance and her career tends to baffle historians.⁷³ Indeed, while postwar conservative churches and Bible institutes continued to crack down on female preachers and leaders, she exerted unprecedented spiritual influence over HPC's pastors and elders, who referred to her reverentially as either "Teacher" or "Dr." Mears (the latter after Bob Jones University awarded her an honorary doctorate in 1949).⁷⁴ Likewise, her preacher "boys" savored her professional counsel and public teaching; Fuller Seminary's professor of homiletics even called her "the best preacher on the West Coast."⁷⁵ But she observed limits. Even though she spoke occasionally at

⁷⁰ Tuner, 145.

⁷¹ Bendroth, 105-17, argues that after World War II, evangelicals replaced missionary service with homemaking as the highest calling for women, a trend following a wider American revival of domesticity in the late 1940s and 1950s. Noting this historiography, Turner, 157, n.89, says that it is not clear whether Mears encouraged homemaking over missions *more* than she did before the war. However, biographical accounts seem to indicate that Mears valued both callings equally, pre- and post-war, and she personally loved hospitality and children.

⁷² Mears, "College Department," Reel 30, Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

⁷³ Turner, 142, suggests that historians have ignored her because she is "difficult to classify and understand," especially in terms of evangelical gender norms.

⁷⁴ The Depression and World War II took men away from full-time Christian service, necessitating more female teachers and leaders; after the war, conservative churches sought to restore divine order by redressing the "feminization" of church and society. During preceding decades, fundamentalists had justified some female Bible teachers and preachers by saying that their "authority" derived from the inherently authoritative, inspired words they taught. See Bendroth, 73-96. Michael Hamilton goes further, arguing that fundamentalist women were allowed wider opportunities for Christian service than their mainline Protestant counterparts, prior to World War II. See Michael Hamilton, "Women, Public Ministry, and American Fundamentalism, 1920-1950," *Religion and American Culture* 3 (Summer 1993): 171-96. In her case, Mears enjoyed a much higher position at HPC and Gospel Light than she likely would have ever obtained under former pastor Riley, who appointed an entirely male Sunday School literature committee to his World Christian Fundamentals Association. Bendroth, 93.

⁷⁵ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 89.

evening church services, she never filled the Sunday-morning pulpit. Also, though she privately advised the male directors of Gospel Light and HPC, she tended to stay silent during board meetings.⁷⁶ How could she, or Hollywood Presbyterian, justify her visibility and effects on men, given their understanding of the biblical mandates and ecclesiastical norms? Her singleness, traditional stances, and unprecedented achievements likely assuaged misgivings. John Turner concludes that, ultimately, her acceptance was due to American-evangelical pragmatism, as her male colleagues circumvented norms to use an adept female leader who gave “lip service” to them.⁷⁷

Mears cultivated her own self-understanding. In a 1954 lecture on running a college department at Fuller Seminary, she dismissed accusations of inconsistency by contending, “I’m just here because the Lord makes me by the nape of the neck. I would never be there otherwise. But I do not run that college department.” On the contrary, she insisted, “I am absolutely a guest speaker...and when I’m through, I sit down.” The normative practice for college leadership was “to use men,” and, she opined, the reason things had “fallen to the wayside in church is because men are not used.”⁷⁸ *What the Bible is All About* further illuminated how she negotiated God’s will for her. For one, the text’s overviews of 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy 2, and Ephesians 5 neglected to mention Paul’s prohibitions against female dominance.⁷⁹ On his instructions for appointing church deacons in 1 Timothy, she glossed that these officers, who were “complementary” to pastor-elders, still “must have the same qualifications,” but added, “sometimes it may be necessary to appoint women as deacons.”⁸⁰ Her Old Testament commentaries seemed to convey her true thoughts. In her commentary on Esther, she compared Haman’s treatment of the Jews to Nazi Germany’s and

⁷⁶ Turner, 152.

⁷⁷ Turner, 142, 154.

⁷⁸ Mears, “How to Build a College Department” (transcript, address to Fuller Seminary Presbyterian Fellowship, n.d., Fall 1954), 11, GLA.

⁷⁹ Mears, *What the Bible is All About*, 462-64, 502-03.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 559.

depicted Esther as an example of God's prerogative to call ordinary people to world-changing missions. The queen's bravery, integrity, and "sweet, winsome" personality augmented her effectiveness.⁸¹ The introduction to the story of Deborah is most illuminating: "Now a prophetess arises in Israel (Judges 4.4). She was one of those rare women whose heart burns with enthusiasm when men's hearts are despondent. Many a queen has reigned with honor and wisdom, and often a woman's voice has struck a deep note which has roused the nations." She also noted that this prophetess had "gained the confidence of the people to such a degree that they had appointed her as judge" [99].⁸²

Mears sometimes called herself a "unique phenomenon" but never, it appears, a prophet.⁸³ Surely, the comparison crossed her mind. Thus, rather than showing brazen inconsistency between her theory and practice on gender, perhaps she was applying a specific biblical hermeneutic to her own circumstances: The New Testament's *prescriptive* commands should be weighed against the Old Testament's *descriptive* teaching on how God had chosen to intervene in Israel's history. Throughout the Bible God accomplished his will through unlikely characters; why could he not work the same today?

The 1947 Forest Home Awakening further conveys the prophetess motif and, consequently, helps explain why Mears's male colleagues were so accepting. As noted, the Acts account of Pentecost introduced the announcement of the first College Briefing Conference. Not only did this confirm that the Fellowship founders thought they were witnessing the end times; it also suggested that they expected sons *and daughters* to prophesy, in accordance with Acts 2.17. Turner's focus on pragmatism ignores a major part of Mears's identity and evangelicalism itself. As one of her closest female mentees recalled:

Here she was teaching men—and in those days some people would not believe that women should be doing that—but Miss Mears was different. Her own gifts were so obviously from the Holy Spirit. She was an influencer of men. I would have to say

⁸¹ Ibid., 160.

⁸² Ibid., 99.

⁸³ Turner, 152.

that she loved us women, but she had an incredible way with men. She was so strong and direct. She was powerful, and men recognized her spiritual authority.⁸⁴

Although Mears's rare authority as an evangelical woman is historically significant, she neither trained female successors, nor, it appears, fundamentally reformed her colleagues' positions on God's *normative* place for women. Yet the gender issue was not incidental to her role in forging postwar evangelical leadership, as it served as a proxy for the Holy Spirit's Holy Spirit's power.

Power through the Holy Spirit

Since her late teenage years, Mears's understanding of the Holy Spirit's work underscored her view of PLP and the entire Christian life. Her family background suggests why. Grandfather W.W. Everts, a Baptist minister who helped found the University of Chicago,⁸⁵ published *The Christian Apostolate* in 1890, a treatise maintaining that the contemporary church still received spiritual gifts such as healing, prophecy, and direct guidance of the believer (this final emphasis was prevalent in Mears's mother's piety).⁸⁶ Childhood tragedies wielded another powerful influence. Suffering from acute bouts of rheumatism and chronic poor eyesight—including an accident with a hatpin that nearly blinded her—young Henrietta saw ailments disappear or drastically improve after receiving the ministry of healing prayer. At age seventeen her mother died unexpectedly, precipitating a spiritual crisis. Pastor Riley hoped she would continue her mother's legacy of domestic service, but the college student soon sensed a call to missionary service in China.⁸⁷ Weak

⁸⁴ Colleen Townsend Evans, quoted in Demarest, "We Called Her Teacher," 14.

⁸⁵ John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), chapter 1.

⁸⁶ W.W. Everts, *The Christian Apostolate* (Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1890). Gary Greig, a descendant of Mears's mother and former C.E.O. of Gospel Light International, has stressed the place of faith healing and other spiritual gifts in Mears's piety, claiming she once admitted to speaking in tongues and having a private prayer language; still, she was known to warn her students about the Pentecostal "Holy Rollers." Gary Greig, Personal interview with author, 4 December 2014, Ventura, CA.

⁸⁷ Mears recounted the story in "The Young People You Teach" (address to the 1959 Philadelphia Sunday School Convention, n.d., 1959), Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

and distraught, she prayed, ““God, if you want me to serve you, you will have to give me the strength.”” Though the missionary call remained unfulfilled, her prayer request seemingly was granted. Recounting the experience, she said, “I came to the realization that God wanted to give me the power of His Holy Spirit, and that all I had to do was receive it. I cannot describe to you what happened in my life. From head to toe I was a different person. In my mind reigned a peace I had never known before, convincing me that God was in me working out his plan.”⁸⁸ Hearing Paul Rader, then pastor of Chicago’s Moody Church, preach about the Victorious Life shortly thereafter buttressed her assurance.⁸⁹

Transatlantic evangelicalism, Keswick/Victorious Life teaching, and faith missions further influenced her views of sanctification and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ Her personal library included works by Andrew Murray and a well-thumbed copy of *Life on the Highest Plane*, a 1928 Victorious Life text by the China Inland Mission’s Ruth Paxson which was influential among faith missionaries.⁹¹ Orr undoubtedly colored her picture of the Holy Spirit, too, as he spoke regularly for her College Department, including leading a weeklong series on the Holy Spirit’s work at the 1949 College Briefing Conference.⁹² In these talks and his 1951 text, *Full Surrender*, he identified the primary “evidence of being filled with the Spirit” as receiving “power unto service.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Mears, “Dimensions of Leadership,” 337.

⁸⁹ Powers, 112-13.

⁹⁰ Mears, “Early Recollection,” named Graham Scroggie, Minister of Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh, Scotland; G. Campbell Morgan, Minister of Westminster Chapel, London, and erudite Bible expositor; and A.C. Dixon, later editor of *The Fundamentals* and pastor of Moody Church; On Morgan and Scroggie, see Bebbington, ed., *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23-24, 102; on Dixon, see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 39, 81-82, 163, 224.

⁹¹ Ruth Paxson, *Life on the Highest Plane* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1928). Her books have been informally catalogued, and they were separated randomly into boxes during the author’s visit to the Gospel Light Archives.

⁹² Bill and Vonette Bright’s personal notes from the 1949 CBC, CRUA.

⁹³ Orr, *Full Surrender* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1951).

Mears's personal library contained some surprisingly charismatic texts, too.⁹⁴ For example, she possessed a copy of *The Two Kinds of Faith* by E.W. Kenyon, the nineteenth-century Baptist pastor often considered the father of "Word of Faith" Pentecostalism, as well as *Exactly: How You May Receive Healing* by Oral Roberts, a personal friend and leader of the postwar Pentecostal healing revival.⁹⁵ Perhaps the most intriguing item in her library was a copy of *When Man Listens* by Cecil Rose, an ambassador of Frank Buchman's controversial Oxford Group, which stressed the Holy Spirit's immediate, internal guidance through the Quiet Time.⁹⁶ A year before Rose's 1937 text appeared, she rejected an inquirer's accusation that she was an Oxford Group member but admitted to having attended one nearby meeting.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, her copy bears her personal library stamp, heavy underlining, margin notes, and what appears to be her own topical label—"prayer."⁹⁸

In *What the Bible is All About*, Mears subtly affirmed the continuation of the spiritual gifts but insisted their use must exalt Christ and edify others. Believers today, therefore, should "covet the best gifts of wisdom, knowledge and faith." However, "If it is God's will for us to have any of these gifts, He will give them to us; otherwise He will not. The Holy Spirit divides *to every man severally as he will* (1 Cor. 12:11)." When pressed by students, she would say that since Paul listed "teaching" first among the gifts, she personally desired it the most. Mears drew upon multiple, sometimes divergent, theological streams: She was a dispensationalist but not a cessationist; a Presbyterian but not a rigid Calvinist; a proto-charismatic but not a full Pentecostal. Perhaps it is most reasonable to call her a

⁹⁴ Mears Archive Inventory List, in author's possession.

⁹⁵ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the Prosperity Gospel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press 2013), 15-25, covers Kenyon's theological contributions to the Word of Faith and Mind Cure movements. When Mears used the phrase, "claiming the promises of God," she alluded to spiritual rather than material blessing. On Roberts' friendship with Mears, see David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 177.

⁹⁶ See ch. 1, 46.

⁹⁷ Mears to Alice M. Drace, April 16, 1936, GLA.

⁹⁸ Cecil Rose, *When Man Listens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937).

theological pragmatist who adapted her doctrine to her Christian experience. In terms of PLP, her experiences directly shaped her understanding of how the Holy Spirit guided believers.

The Non-Mysterious Mystery of God's Will

Following the summer of 1952, Mears reported to her colleagues that she had had another seminal realization about the Holy Spirit, leadership, and discerning God's will. The epiphany occurred at Forest Home, when she was invited to give the PLP talk. After praying for God to give her "something new" about the topic, she had a fresh insight into Philippians 2:12-13 while listening to a conference speaker teach about the book. Combining this text-- "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"—with Romans 12:1-2, she concluded:

If we yield ourselves, He wants to reveal His will to us. And how does He reveal His will? If we are 'working out our salvation with fear and trembling' then God is in us and working out His will and His pleasure through the renewing of our minds! To us, the will of God, then, doesn't have to be vague, mystical, uncertainty [*sic?*]; He will renew our minds, direct our thoughts. It is as simple as that. If we yield ourselves to Him, He wants to reveal His will to us. Only our holding back will prevent it!⁹⁹

As she later acknowledged, the Forest Home experience influenced her perception of discerning God's will as a Christian leader. God freely gave a "reservoir of sustaining force that never fails" in Christ, who lived within and fulfilled God's "perfect will" through the yielded Christian. Regarding leadership, she claimed that her epiphany on Phil. 2:12-13 was "the most daring idea" she ever had. Elaborating on this in a later address, she said, "The secret of power and of being in the will of God was not something that I had to sweat and strain for; it was, rather, what I had to recognize as already present in my life. God's will is God himself, and that is my power: I was transformed with the thought." The realization gave her strength to "sustain any defeat or to face any challenge." Since then, she desired for God to "bring every thought into the mastery of Christ" so that she could truly be a

⁹⁹ Powers, 63.

“Christian leader” in its fullest sense.¹⁰⁰ The experience transformed her thinking, practice, and teaching about discerning God’s will. She gave up all-night prayer meetings and the idea of “beating one’s breast day and night, pleading to know God’s will.” God wanted to reveal His will to the faithful Christian; thus, yielding to Christ led to “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” She debuted this new message during her autumn 1952 tour of East Asia (yet another self-sponsored trip), when she met with perplexed missionaries in Korea and Formosa whose callings had been stymied by Communist advance. What, now, was God’s plan for their lives? To trust the Holy Spirit’s inner guidance, she responded. Mature Christian leaders, she insisted, “do not have to go chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, or strain after something outside ourselves.”¹⁰¹ It was impossible for these yielded, faithful missionaries to “make a mistake,” when it came to following God’s will.¹⁰²

Returning stateside in April 1953, she spread her discernment insights to her Hollywood constituency. In the beginning, at least, she adapted her presentation of discernment to the maturity level of her audiences, believing that only seasoned Christian leaders, like missionaries, could claim to have the “mind of Christ.” Two talks that year to the Hollywood Christian Group (HCG) demonstrated this. Founded in 1949, the group fulfilled Mears’s hopes to reach the movie industry. At larger evangelistic meetings the HCG welcomed mature believers, as well as members’ non-Christian guests and newer converts. In the first 1953 address, she targeted unbelievers by stressing that only God’s “children” could know His will. For these and any recent converts, she outlined six foundational steps of discernment. First, it was imperative to know the Bible and its depiction of sin as “anything that keeps one from God.” After confessing such sin, one must joyfully obey God’s biblically revealed will to receive further individual guidance. Second, the believer

¹⁰⁰ Mears, “Dimensions of Leadership,” 341.

¹⁰¹ Powers, 63-64.

¹⁰² Mears, “The Orient: What to Do About It” (address to the Hollywood Christian Group, December 8, 1952), GLA. The archival information for this address is perhaps unreliable.

should listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit through prayer, ideally a “two-way conversation,” where the believer listened to God more than the reverse. Mentioning that many inquired if she personally experienced this as “a literal voice from heaven,” she confessed, “I don’t know...but I sure talk back!” Third, God revealed His will through circumstances, including finances. As she had told an admitted college applicant hesitating to enroll, his inability to pay the tuition should have been “enough of a sign”; after all, God’s children had a “rich father” who always provided what was needed to accomplish his plans. Likewise, when facing recurring obstacles, Christians should “stop knocking on the same closed door.” Fourth, she advised seeking counsel from godly friends. For the fifth and sixth steps, she invoked the spiritual principles given in Psalm 37:5 and Romans 12:1-2 about committing one’s will, plans, and body to God. Finally, she described her 1952 epiphany at Forest Home but prefaced it by saying, “I save this to the end because it is for the more mature Christian probably.”¹⁰³

In another 1953 HCG address, one possibly given to a more exclusive gathering of “mature” believers, she skipped this beginner’s course in discernment. Knowing God’s will, she said, constituted a matter of “spiritual law.” It operated if certain conditions were met: offering an open, yielded mind to God while continuing to obey his will as the individual already knew it. Echoing (though not citing) late nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Henry Drummond, she identified the secret to knowing God’s will as *doing* His will.¹⁰⁴ This included ceasing any sinful habit or desire that might cut off the internal, “electrical connection” to the Holy Spirit’s light. These insights so profoundly changed her perspective that, as she told the HCG, she now refused to pray with individual students fretting over God’s will for their lives. It was a “waste of time,” akin to a driver constantly stopping and starting at every street corner. “It’s a law! It works when you operate it!” she exclaimed.

¹⁰³ Mears, “God’s Laws--Knowing God’s Will” (address to the Hollywood Christian Group, n.d., ca. 1953), Reel 44, Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 1. Mears had quoted from Drummond’s writings early in her Hollywood Presbyterian career. See Migliazzo, “The Education of Henrietta C. Mears,” 71.

Mears's trust in the Holy Spirit's internal guidance was so strong that she claimed, "As I walk down the street, I know am the walking will of God for Henrietta Mears."¹⁰⁵ Three years later, in a closing address to the 1956 College Briefing Conference, she told the emerging leaders, "a few years ago, when God gave me that verse [Phil 2.12-13] for myself," she knew "my life never had to end in failure, and in the ordinary, and being out of the will of God." While many Christians "fizzle out," she said, "when I'm 150 the Lord will still be working in my mind to know what His will is for me and I'm going to do his pleasure." Again, she omitted a list of other discernment tests, demonstrating that she extended her definition of "mature" Christian to these student leaders.¹⁰⁶

What the Bible is All About did not outline a specific process for discerning God's will. On Philippians 2:12, she wrote, "Happy is the person who finds God's plan for his life and falls in with it."¹⁰⁷ As a "personal matter," individuals must never ask the "Commander-in-Chief the 'why' of anything He asks [them] to do." In her gloss on 1 John, she wrote, "Do you know His will for your life?...This is a test of your Christian life. Are you obedient to His Word? His still small voice? Many times we do not want to let God talk to us...because we are afraid of His will for us." Speaking to youth, she wrote, "God has a career for each one of us. He has a plan for every step of our lives, for 'the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.'" Although reassuring, this precept was also convicting, demanding obedience "in everything for 'whatsoever is not of faith is sin.'" Ultimately, the secret to knowing God's will was "to know Him better."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Mears, "God's Laws--Knowing God's Will" (address to Hollywood Christian Group, n.d., ca. 1953), Reel 44, Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

¹⁰⁶ Mears (address to 1956 College Briefing Conference Closing Session, n.d., August 1956), Reel 66, Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

¹⁰⁷ Mears, *What the Bible is All About*, 510-11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 635-36. Elsewhere in the book, she taught that God might still reveal His will to obedient Christians through angelic visions.

God's Plan for My Life: PLP for the Junior-High Student

In teaching that God guided the mature, surrendered Christian automatically, Mears retained the conviction that youth still needed specific guidance for life's major decisions. Her most comprehensive teaching on PLP for youth was the multi-part series, *God's Plan of the Ages*, written for junior-high students, typically fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds just beginning to contemplate their futures. In 1940, Gospel Light first released *God's Plan of the Ages* as a complete, four-part series. Similarly to *What the Bible is All About*, the units provided a bird's-eye view of the Bible, explicating God's purposes for creation, Israel, Christ, the church, and the end times. Dispensational premillennialism underscored the material, as shown in the teaching about the various soteriological "ages" of biblical history and the prophesied millennium.¹⁰⁹ But the text exuded none of the apocalyptic gloom that plagued some sectors of American fundamentalism circa 1940.¹¹⁰ Rather, the series reframed Christianity into a robust, positive picture of biblical history and God's sovereignty.¹¹¹

The final unit of the 1940 edition of *God's Plan for the Ages*, entitled "The Challenges of the Christian Life," had been published previously, in 1936, as a stand-alone study of God's will for Christian character and discipline. One lesson, "the Challenge to Follow," spoke generally about how all Christians should follow Jesus in daily life. The final review in the Pupil's Book summarized this lesson by stating that Christ knew God the Father "had a plan for His coming into the world" and "followed out the plan" in "every detail." Applying this to the student, the lesson summary ended, "Do you believe God has a plan for you?"¹¹² A single biblical reference to Eph. 2:10, which stated that Christians were

¹⁰⁹ Mears, *God's Plan of the Ages, Part Three* (Hollywood, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1940).

¹¹⁰ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 294-95; Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 90-109, notes that American dispensationalists' pessimistic view of world affairs, though not prophetic timeline, resonated with secular observers in the wake of economic turmoil and world war. Revivalistic fundamentalists, like Mears, optimistically focused on evangelism and personal holiness.

¹¹¹ Mears, *God's Plan of the Ages, Part One* (Hollywood, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1934).

¹¹² Mears, "Lesson Thirteen: Review," *The Challenges of the Christian Life: For the Pupil* (Hollywood, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1936), 55.

God's "workmanship," created "unto good works," presented God's plan in a pious light highlighting spiritual development. The 1951 revised edition of *God's Plan of the Ages* included the same summary lesson without any updates.¹¹³ The material presented thirteen lessons, including an introduction and summary, with individual lessons on eleven facets of Christian life such as Bible study, prayer, evangelizing, stewardship, and loving God.

In 1959, Gospel Light released a revised, expanded version of *God's Plan for the Ages*. For this edition, Mears repackaged the fourth unit under a new title, *God's Plan for My Life*.¹¹⁴ While this fourth unit covered the same eleven "challenges of the Christian life" as the 1940 and 1951 editions, *God's Plan for My Life* updated the earlier versions' introductory lessons with "The Challenge to Know and Do the Will of God."¹¹⁵ The study's sole focus on PLP hinted that the topic had gained priority over the years. Before tackling the challenges of Christian life, the student first needed to be "willing to follow God's plan for his life."¹¹⁶

The preface to the Teacher's Manual stated, "the young people have studied God's great plan, as it is revealed in the Bible, for the universe, the world, nations and peoples. Now it is time to talk about God's plan for each individual life. What a thrill it is to know that the great God Who planned and controls the universe has a special plan for my life." The course's objective was to "show the difference between God's plan and man's plans and to challenge young people to discover and follow God's plan for them." By ending the series with the individualized divine plan, the course progressively narrowed the student's view of

¹¹³ Idem, "Lesson Thirteen: Review, *The Challenges to the Christian Life: Pupil's Book* (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1951), 48.

¹¹⁴ Idem, *God's Plan for My Life* (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1959). The original copies of each edition are held in the Gospel Light Archives. The publication history is sketched in a commemorative version GLINT released in 2008. See preface to Mears, *God's Plan for My Life*, Rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: GLINT, 2008).

¹¹⁵ The lesson's content closely followed Cecil Rose, "Learning God's Plan," in *When Man Listens*, 25-38.

¹¹⁶ Mears, *God's Plan for My Life* [hereafter, GPFML]: *Teacher's Manual*, 2.

divine sovereignty from eternal space and time to the finite concerns of (mostly American) teenagers—but Mears wanted students to see themselves as part of the divine order. Aware that public-school students began studying science in ninth grade, Mears intended *God's Plan of the Ages* to present a “biblical,” “scientific” overview of human origins that presented Creationism as a valid alternative to Darwinism and secularism. As subsequent decades proved, junior high students abandoned Sunday school at a higher rate than any other demographic. Instruction for these students, therefore, needed to be compelling. As she told HPC’s teachers in early 1960, she hoped the 1959 edition would “ground [the student] in the Word of God by giving him a course to show him that God has a plan for his life before the foundation of the world and he did not evolve from monkeys.”¹¹⁷

Beyond the evolutionary question, *God's Plan for My Life* portrayed PLP as an especially relevant teaching to Cold War-era teenagers, who asked, more than any previous generation, “for what am I living?” The “proper answer,” according to the preface, would “give young people satisfaction, a sense of security, joy, peace and power in this confused atomic age.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, the age of backyard bomb shelters and public-school attack drills—not to mention racial tension and the start of the Space Race—was rife with uncertainty. As scientific research, higher education, and white-collar careers boomed, so did students’ decision-making responsibilities. Thus, for many anxious Christian students, the message that God remained in control surely came as good news.¹¹⁹ Though the series was intended for Christian teenagers, the preface clarified that teachers should expect a few non-believers

¹¹⁷ Mears (address to Christian Educators Luncheon, January 6, 1960), GLA.

¹¹⁸ Idem, “Lesson One: The Challenge to Know and Do the Will of God,” *GPFML: Teacher's Manual*, 4.

¹¹⁹ See Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 189-93. Ellwood identifies 1957 as the end of the optimistic “Fifties Mood” due to the desegregation-fueled Little Rock Crisis and Sputnik’s launch, the latter a “psychological blow” to postwar American ego. James T. Patterson provides an excellent overview of the 1950s baby boom, economic growth, racial tension, and post-1957 demise of the American cultural consensus. See especially chapters 3-4 and 11-14 of Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-74* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 59-102; 325-455.

to be in their classes, who should be shown how to accept Christ as Savior before trying to follow him as Lord.¹²⁰

The text of the first lesson, “The Challenge to Know and Do the Will of God,” chimed, “Isn’t it a thrill to know that God has a special plan for your life? The most important thing as a Christian is to know God’s will, and to know what part He has for you in His great plan. When you know God’s will, your life is no longer a hit-and-miss affair. You have direction—you know where you are going. You have a purpose—you know what you are living for.” Mears portrayed God’s will holistically, covering a range of “very specific issues,” including what church or Sunday school to attend, what social invitations to accept, what friends to make, how to spend one’s leisure time, and what courses to take in school. The lesson’s primary goal, nevertheless, was to help students discover their God-ordained careers, as she told her ninth-grade audience, “You are now old enough to begin seeking God’s will for your life’s work.”¹²¹ Regarding social class, the demographic targeted seemed to be middle-class, suburban teenagers enjoying the privileges of full-time education, leisure time, and quality church options. Though lauding professions such as engineering and the ministry, she did not presume all students to be university-bound, as shown by her validation of farming, manual trades, and—for her girls—nursing in the divine economy. “God wants people in every honorable profession and type of work,” she said.¹²²

Proceeding with the lesson, she portrayed God as the “great architect of the universe,” who had a plan for the universe throughout eternity and “a plan for your life in this great twentieth century.”¹²³ The 1951 material had employed this illustration, as well, but the 1959 edition more closely sketched the implications for the individual. “Every good

¹²⁰ Mears, preface to *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 2.

¹²¹ Mears, “Lesson One: The Challenge to Know and Do God’s Will,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

builder tries to build according to the architect's blueprint so that the finished construction might be perfect." Likewise, Christians "must *know* what God's plan is and then be willing to follow it in every detail if [they] would build strong, worthwhile Christian lives."¹²⁴

Unlike other Mears curricula, which did not feature bibliographies, the 1959 edition identified specific influences upon her PLP teaching. These included Higher Life classics—Andrew Murray's *Abide in Christ*, Francis Ridley Havergal's *Kept for the Master's Use*, and Paxson's *Life on the Highest Plane*—as well as *Now That I Believe* by YFC's Robert Cook. The Paxson and Murray texts especially conveyed the debt her most mature teaching about PLP owed to a more mystical style of piety. Discrepancies between the 1951 and 1959 editions' treatment of discernment bore the mark of her Forest Home epiphany, as well.

The Discernment Process from 1951 to 1959

In both 1951 and 1959, Mears recommended a three-pronged approach to discerning God's will. In 1951 she used the example of a sea captain awaiting the alignment of distant shore lights to indicate the correct route, a perennial illustration among evangelicals. As mentioned, her 1951 PLP discussion appeared well into the study in "Lesson Nine: The Challenge to Follow," and only as one component of the lifelong duty to obey Christ and to evangelize. In a dialogue box she enumerated the checks for determining God's will. "Today Christ has given us three distinct ways in which he speaks: 1. The voice of the Scriptures. 2. The voice of conscience directed by the Holy Spirit. 3. The voice of circumstances."¹²⁵ Perhaps the less individualized focus of the 1951 study explained why the Bible, with its universal commands to follow Christ's example, topped her discernment guidelines. But perhaps it was the timing—a year before her 1952 Forest Home experience. Regardless, her discernment steps in *God's Plan for My Life* exuded her newfound confidence in the Holy Spirit to guide a mature Christian's thoughts and steps to fulfill God's will.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mears, "Lesson Nine: The Challenge to Follow," *The Challenges of the Christian Life: Teacher's Book* (Glendale, CA: 1951), 41-42.

Compared to her 1951 formula, the specific steps listed in 1959 underscored the efficacy of inward leading, shown by a revised order of operations and an updated travel metaphor. Introducing the topic, she wrote, “Some things the Christian knows are/aren’t God’s will because the Bible says so; other issues he knows because he knows God. The Holy Spirit speaks through conscience.”¹²⁶ Then she presented a rearranged version of the 1951 steps. Instead of the Bible, “Guidance of the Holy Spirit” took over the top position. She replaced the classic ship-captain illustration with one more relevant to a generation accustomed to flight. “A pilot, while flying his plane, hears a voice giving information and instructions. He sees no one; he has contact with no one; he only hears a voice. So if you are to be ‘on the beam’ of God’s will, there must first be the *still small voice* of the Holy Spirit speaking to you. (1 Kings 19:12).”¹²⁷ “On the beam” was a popular idiom for staying on course, derived from electronic radio signals. To stay on the right life path, one needed guidance as direct and precise as a pilot’s instructions. Especially in the Old Testament, God led numerous characters in such a way, through blatant external signs or a voice from the clouds. Though *God’s Plan for My Life* did not instruct the contemporary individual to listen for a literal, audible voice, students nevertheless should expect to receive guidance as lucid as if “God has spoken.”¹²⁸

The “still, small voice” referenced 1 Kings 19, the account of God leading the prophet Elijah. For the present-day individual, this meant, “God thus gives you an inward desire to do that which is His will for you. This is the voice of conscience.”¹²⁹ Desire, conscience, the still, small voice—were these really the same? “Conscience,” in normal usage, referred to the inward conviction that an action was either morally good or evil. In

¹²⁶ Idem, “Lesson One,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 5.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 5-6.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 6-7. As noted above, in various 1950s addresses she claimed ignorance on whether the divine “voice” was audible.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 6.

terms of PLP, after weighing whether a career or other decision entailed explicitly sinful, immoral accommodation, one might speak of the Holy Spirit's leading rather than the stirrings of "conscience." But treating "inward desire" as synonymous with the "voice of conscience" (or the Spirit) perhaps opened the door for interpreting *any* personal want as something God had willed. Once again, Mears displayed her tendency to conflate the moral, universal will of God with His situational, directive will for individuals. The first was objective, the second subjective. After her Forest Home experience, she taught that Christians no longer needed to "strain for something outside" of themselves when seeking God's will. Likewise, her hypothetical pilot "sees no one; has contact with no one" but still "hears a voice giving instructions;" he relies primarily on his internalized leading. The ship's captain, in contrast, patiently waits to see the shore lights in the distance—guides outside of himself.

The second step of her new discernment method provided some objectivity. After recognizing the "guidance of the Holy Spirit," the individual should consult Scripture, much like the pilot consulting a compass to corroborate what the air-traffic-control was saying in his headset. Mears did caution students that they "dare not trust impulse or [their] conscience alone," as they may "misunderstand the directions that are given," possibly because their "own desire has so jammed the airways that God cannot speak" to them.¹³⁰ By checking the Christian's compass, "God's written word," students could "make certain that it is God through His Holy Spirit speaking to [their] heart." Since God's will would "never be in contradiction" with the "inspired and infallible" Bible, students must ensure that their "personal desire lines up with God's clear declarations in His Word."¹³¹ By insisting upon the Bible's "clear declarations," Mears advanced the "Common Sense" hermeneutic prominent in mid-century American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. As she put it in

¹³⁰ Cf. Rose, *When Man Listens*, 32. Rose wrote, "God can only continue to speak to us if we obey. Disobedience blocks the line."

¹³¹ Mears, "Lesson One," *GPFML: Teacher's Manual*, 6.

What the Bible is All About, Christians “must come to [the Bible] in a common sense fashion”; they must “believe every book is about something and read and reread until [they] found out what that something is.”¹³²

Though testing desires against biblical commands put a check on subjectivity, the order of operations mattered. If individuals started with the assumption that their inner voice was in fact the Holy Spirit speaking *until proven otherwise*, their desires were effectually innocent until proven guilty. Arguably, this could lead one to reinterpret Scripture to fit one’s wishes and disregard contrary passages, thus succumbing to confirmation bias. Was it wise, furthermore, to encourage ninth graders to consult their compass in isolation? Could a young teenager, even one who had progressed through the entire Gospel Light curriculum—including Lesson Two of “God’s Plan” about regular Bible study—boast such an expert grasp on the Scriptures that guidance from a pastor, parent, or even Bible commentary was unnecessary? Compared to the traditional trades, numerous modern careers raised complicated ethical questions that might flummox even the most mature, biblically literate Christian searching for God’s “clear declarations.” To help resolve such dilemmas, she offered step three, heeding “providential circumstances.” “Sometimes the pilot is not equipped, capable nor qualified to fly through the bad weather,” meaning, if a circumstance “stops us from doing what we believe is God’s will, it may be that God is using this method to keep us from doing that which we are not qualified to do.” Typically, God would not lead the tone-deaf to singing careers or, more seriously, call those with health issues or home responsibilities to foreign mission fields. In some cases, she noted, God decisively changed circumstances and removed certain obstacles to make His will “obvious.”¹³³

¹³² Idem, *What the Bible is All About*, 10. When Mears denied Oxford Group association, she pointed to her Sunday School material, saying it “teaches what the Scripture says” rather than “interprets” it. See Mears to Alice M. Drace, April 16, 1936, GLA.

¹³³ Idem, “Lesson One,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 4.

She summarized the steps as follows: “The strong inner assurance, the Word of God and providential circumstances should agree. When all of these harmonize, it is safe to say that God has spoken and that you know His will.” The venue through which God would “speak” to the “heart” was prayer, emanating from the “sincere desire that the Lord answer in accordance with His will.”¹³⁴ Lesson Four of *God’s Plan for My Life* covered prayer in detail and advanced the possibility of receiving direct communication from the spiritual realms. “The air around us is filled with messages and music which we cannot hear,” she wrote. “If you turn on your radio, you can listen in. God has messages for me, too, but unless my will is set on listening to what God would say to me, unless my heart is in tune with Him, I shall not hear His message.”¹³⁵

Having completed all discernment checks, students should wait until “convinced” that they knew what the Lord wanted them to do, then “dare to act,” confidently taking God “at His word.” Though Mears’s steps evoked Meyer’s in *The Secret of Guidance*, the latter had treated the Christian’s will and desires more skeptically, requiring a preparatory period of yielding and rigorous examination of one’s motives before one could proceed with the discernment process. Mears, conversely, instructed students that only *after* they were “convinced” they knew God’s specific will should they “yield” their individual “free will” through a voluntarily “surrender” of it “back to God.” She referenced two favorite verses, the familiar Psalm 37:5 (about committing one’s steps) and Philippians 4:13, using the latter to assure students they could do “all things through Christ who strengthens” them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit “controlling and guiding” the believer, students would find no part of God’s plan impossible.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁵ Mears, “Lesson Four: The Challenge to Pray,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 18.

¹³⁶ Mears, “Lesson One,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 7.

As *God's Plan for My Life* demonstrated, Mears affirmed that Christians could ascertain, unequivocally, God's exact will for them—requiring, of course, obedience to “what He would have us to do,” “whenever He asks.” Intended to palliate anxious students, her method may well be accused of oversimplification. For example, all practical and moral considerations being equal, it failed to offer a student deciding between colleges or careers any rubric beyond youthful caprice. In her Hollywood ministry, Mears shepherded some of the nation's most upwardly mobile, talented, privileged students—would it really be so easy for them to discover their exact, divinely-ordered path? Evidently not. Her College Department students regularly implored her for guidance and special prayer about God's plans but, as discussed, after 1953 she stopped obliging. When a male student declared he had sensed a call to pursue ministry over a profession, she remained skeptical until the student confirmed that his compulsion was too strong to pursue any other path.¹³⁷ This inward “voice,” assumed to be the Holy Spirit, trumped all other considerations, even the concrete needs of the mission field.

Despite the importance of evangelism in Mears's program, she stressed that objective need was “not the call.”¹³⁸ The missionary call was a matter for private, individual discussion rather than high-pressure, corporate appeals.¹³⁹ In addition, she maintained that no geographical field was superior to another, as taught in Lesson Five of *God's Plan for my Life*, “The Challenge to Go.” In this lesson's introduction, she told her teachers, “You have your own mission field in front of you every Sunday. The young people whom you face need the Lord just as desperately as do the heathen on the other side of the globe. The Lord has called you to this field of service.”¹⁴⁰ Still, the lesson text conveyed her assumption that most

¹³⁷ Powers, 77-78.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 125. See also M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 106.

¹³⁹ Mears, “College Department,” Reel 30. GLA.

adolescent Christians would be, at least, considering a missionary career. For example, her assertion in Lesson One that even young teenagers could determine God’s plan seemed to be based on statistical data, reported in “The Challenge to Go,” showing that “90 percent of all missionaries hear the call of Christ to this service by the time that they are fifteen years old.”¹⁴¹ In addition, she drew her first examples of how providential circumstances could reveal God’s will from missions. A student considering missionary service could be assured that their “desire is certainly in line with Bible teaching,” yet because “not all people are missionaries,” there “must be another test.” Complications from “health” or “home responsibilities” that made life overseas “impossible” could be “indications of God’s will.”¹⁴²

No compelling evidence suggests that Mears’s teaching on missions changed significantly over time. From her own childhood experience she understood how circumstances and specific leading—or lack thereof, in her case—could prevent an individual from pursuing a lifelong ministry overseas. The 1936 edition of *Challenges of the Christian Life: Student Book* taught in “The Challenge to Go” that although the Great Commission called all Christians to go into the world with the gospel, “Each one of us has our own world to reach for Christ.”¹⁴³ Also, she portrayed this challenge as present rather than future, obligating one to everyday evangelism over any future career. The 1951 Teacher’s Book added that God’s “blue prints” for world evangelization meant that “*witnessing is to be the main work of the whole church all the time* [emphasis original].” Thus, Christ’s command to “Go” was issued to “every Christian,” “not just to

¹⁴⁰ Mears, “Lesson Five: The Challenge to Go,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 24.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 24. Compare to “Lesson One,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 5.

¹⁴² Mears, “Lesson One,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Manual*, 6.

¹⁴³ Mears, “Lesson Five: The Challenge to Go,” *The Challenges of the Christian Life: For the Pupil* (Hollywood, CA: Gospel Light Press, 1936), 22.

missionaries.”¹⁴⁴ The call to evangelize was not synonymous with a call to foreign missions. She explained, “He will not send everyone across the water to dark and heathen lands, but it is not for us to say where our place is. We are just to report for directions. Let us remember that the Lord has a little world for each one of us to evangelize.”¹⁴⁵ Compared to 1951, the 1959 text, particularly the introductory lesson, contained more explicit approval of domestic vocations, reasonably explained by its more practical, individualized focus. Nevertheless, the 1936, 1951, and 1959 editions all emphasized that the most important part of answering “the challenge to go” was to obey God’s *specific* orders, going only to the “special place” God planned for each believer.¹⁴⁶

PLP as Good News

The overall character of PLP, as taught in *God’s Plan for My Life*, was sunny, sanguine, and student-centered. Whereas *Challenges of the Christian Life* (1936) featured chivalrous illustrations of armored, medieval knights and had a drab, brown cover, *God’s Plan for My Life* was packaged in a shiny, robin’s-egg blue, featured a boy sitting pensively in nature, and contained crossword puzzles on the lesson themes. The imagery complemented Mears’s innovative teaching methods.¹⁴⁷ Though claiming to have derived her educational and psychological theory from “watching God work in the lives of individuals,”¹⁴⁸ she drew upon the work of select Christian psychologists and the prominent Deweyian perspective that education was about cultivating learners more than propagating

¹⁴⁴ Mears, “Lesson Five: The Challenge to Go,” *The Challenges of the Christian Life: Teacher’s Book* (Glendale, CA: 1951), 22.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Mears, “Lesson Five: The Challenge to Go,” *GPFML: Teacher’s Book*, 27.

¹⁴⁷ Lois and Mary LeBar, who headed Wheaton College’s Christian Education Department in the same era, also advocated “child-centered” approaches to teaching. See Bendroth, 87.

¹⁴⁸ Mears, “Personality” (address to Sunday School convention, ca 1958), Mears Audio Archive, GLA.

facts.¹⁴⁹ As she had told Wilbur Smith in 1948, “It is easier to teach the facts of Genesis than to help a youth discover Christ’s will for his life.” How this framed her brand of PLP is shown in the address, “Who are the young people you teach?” one of four signature addresses appended to her 1966 biography.¹⁵⁰

Teachers, Mears said, must view the young adult as “an end in himself, a dynamic personality, capable, under God, of realizing his best self.” Teachers thus must understand what youth were “striving for” to help them understand themselves. Youth deserved to receive an education that embraced “all that the twentieth century offers” while satisfying the “quest for reality, for changeless standards in a changing world.” Such education would transcend “mere facts” by teaching students to “discover the meaning of life,” to live purposefully in a “world seemingly without purpose.”¹⁵¹ Desiring security above all, youth also desired recognition. As they considered their future careers, they must be shown that it was possible to “fulfill their ambitions in Christ.”¹⁵² Consequently, instead of relying on the vocational guidance offered in public schools, the church should be “more concerned with the guiding of our youth in their choice of careers that will do honor to their religious convictions.”¹⁵³ Other than security and recognition, youth chiefly sought “adventure, achievement, and enjoyment.” Students wanted their lives to count, to be “doers” driven by a worthy purpose. The “restless striving for meaning,” she declared, provided teachers with perhaps the “grandest opportunity to direct the minds of our youth to God.” Unfortunately, she lamented, the world “diverts them from the Christian influences which would give these

¹⁴⁹ Leyda, “Henrietta C. Mears: Evangelical Entrepreneur,” 59. See also Turner, 143.

¹⁵⁰ Mears, “Who Are the Young People You Teach?” in Baldwin and Benson, 307-29.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 315.

[strivings] proper direction.”¹⁵⁴ This statement raises the question of whether she considered youthful desires to be spiritually neutral rather than inherently fallen and inclined towards sin. Conversely, it seemed to imply that the teenager’s innate “urges” were potentially good, if simply *nurtured* by godly influences. Rather than dwell on their moral failings, students should confidently proceed with the knowledge that “they are sons and daughters of God and He has a purpose for their lives.” Under God’s direction, youth should think independently and determine their own life course. She observed that while it was once the social norm for adults to dictate youth’s courtship, amusements, manners, and, “until recently, what vocation to choose,” that era was rapidly passing. If young people failed to think for themselves they would passively “change drivers,” replacing their parents’ and pastors’ guidance with their college professors’ creeds—a warning aimed at evangelicals wary of American universities’ increasing secularism.¹⁵⁵

All of these objectives laid the foundation for the final challenge: “*Assist them to see that God has a blueprint for their lives.*” The most important thing for a Christian youth to discover is the plan of God for his life. What is more exciting than to search for the divine plan for one’s career? What gives deeper satisfaction than building according to that scheme?” Without such direction, a young adult’s life would be “swamped and swept by winds of adversity and emotions.”¹⁵⁶ In sum, for Mears, Christian education should create an atmosphere wherein youth might understand themselves, think for themselves, and then realize their highest selves and ambitions under God’s direction. Ultimately, teachers must “gear youth into Christian service—regardless of what the specific occupation may be—and to encourage the utmost skill in the fulfillment of this service.” Instead of enthusiastic but

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 317.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 326. On the secular character of the postwar American university, see Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 408-16.

¹⁵⁶ Mears, “Who are the Young People?” 328.

uncommitted idealists, she contended, the “church today needs experts in doing the will of God.” Mears’s treatment of PLP in her educational philosophy rested on a synergistic understanding of how the divine and human wills interacted: God worked with and through individual personalities, juvenile urges, and cultural realities to accomplish his purposes. She trained her students and future leaders to refine their personalities, goals, and knowledge so that any outside observer might see that God’s plan inspired human excellence. As she often said, contemporary youth desired reality rather than religion. In addition to presenting the most accurate, compelling view of reality, Christianity, in her view, offered the most satisfying, fulfilling, and *abundant* version of individual life. Although her teaching philosophy was student-centered, she rejected modern educational trends that encouraged students to live only for themselves. Self, she insisted, was the “least thing worth living for,” and Christ taught that “man finds his true self only when he is willing to lose himself in God’s plan.”¹⁵⁷

Mears’s winsome, culturally relevant, ambitious take on PLP reflected her cultural context. Living in a mansion adjacent to famed Sunset Boulevard, she hobnobbed with the rich, successful, and famous and spoke periodically for the Hollywood Christian Group. In a late 1950s message, she presented PLP in a supremely inspirational light. Knowing God’s will for one’s life, she said, would lead one to find ultimate peace and freedom from anxiety. The answer to life’s most perplexing questions—“How can I know what to do with my life? What can I do to get rid of all my obstacles? I’m in turmoil, my mortgage is due, my job isn’t good, everything is wrong, and I’m out of joint with everyone—what can I do?”—was simply to heed Psalm 37:5. “Committing one’s way” to God meant “passing problems” on to Him to resolve. Doing this every morning would bring peace and certainty as to what God wanted one to do throughout the day. Psalm 37:5 could even save marriages, she said, illustrating this with an anecdote from private counselling experience. In a closing invitation to both unbelievers and believers, she promised that any who committed their talents and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 329.

concerns to God with an open heart and mind would realize the beauty of His plan in their lives.¹⁵⁸

Although she had extolled the “wonderful” nature of God’s plan since the 1940s, in earlier addresses she more closely conflated this with devotional rigor and the willingness to be an “expendable” soldier for Christ, themes seemingly at odds with her inspirational, even therapeutic message to Hollywood stars a decade later. Rather than cultural accommodation, perhaps the softened teaching reflected her personal demeanor toward the end of her life. According to her biographers, when prayer appeared to heal a potentially blinding ruptured blood vessel in late 1957, she began delving deeper into her study of the Holy Spirit, telling friends that although she had experienced “the spiritual gifts,” she now wanted “all that the Spirit has for me.” Consequently, she outwardly “mellowed,” becoming more gracious, peaceful, and secure in her final years. Upon her death in May 1963, Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine printed an inspirational meditation she wrote shortly before her death, entitled, “Claim the Promises of God.”¹⁵⁹ Mears’s biographers have highlighted buoyant lines such as “Dream big,” “There is no magic in small plans,” and “Be ambitious for Christ.” For PLP, perhaps her most significant maxim was the following: “God will lead you and give you the desire in your heart for the one place He wants you to fill.”¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

When Mears effused about God’s plan “in this great twentieth century,” she really meant, “this American century.” As *Time-Life* publisher Henry R. Luce proclaimed in 1941, the United States possessed the resources, influence, and responsibility to lead an ailing

¹⁵⁸ Mears, “God’s Laws” (address to Hollywood Christian Group, n.d., ca. 1958), Reel 22, Mears Audio Archive, GLA. In the speech Mears mentioned the group’s launch “8.5 years ago.”

¹⁵⁹ Mears, “Claim the Promises of God,” *Decision*, May 1963.

¹⁶⁰ Powers, book jacket; 125-26.

world in (as Mears put it, referencing Esther) “such a time as this.”¹⁶¹ In that light, Mears’s variety of PLP struck a balance between self-denial and self-fulfillment. From her base in the land of opportunity—Hollywood—she taught and embodied the belief that dedicating oneself to God’s entailed developing and capitalizing upon one’s unique talents, personality, ambitions, desires, and social privileges. Mears’s teaching on discernment drifted closer to self-fulfillment after 1952, when she introduced the idea that a “mature,” yielded Christian could stop straining for external indications of God’s will and instead trust that the Holy Spirit would work out the divine plan automatically by transforming one’s thoughts and desires. By the decade’s end, however, she evinced more confidence in the ability of less mature Christians, including young teenagers and Hollywood celebrities, to discern the “still, small voice” guiding one from within. Although her epiphany on the Holy Spirit mirrored developments in the Chicago-centered ministries, challenges to the foreign missionary enterprise had not prompted it. The next chapter explores how three of her proteges transformed one component of her teaching from an exhortation to Christians to an evangelistic message for all.

¹⁶¹ Henry R. Luce, “The American Century,” *Life*, February 7, 1941. See also Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 7.

Chapter Four: The Gospel of God's Plan

In summer 1947, Henrietta Mears drafted young adults to the first annual College Briefing Conference with the line, “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”¹ This chapter argues that after 1947, this “gospel of God’s plan” rose to the prominence in popular evangelism, owing much to Mears’s Hollywood circle. Focusing specifically on Richard Halverson (1916-95), Bill Bright (1913-2003), and Billy Graham (1918-2018), the first section traces their development of unique evangelistic messages which framed the overall Christian life in terms of God’s providential plan for the individual. A second, briefer section explores how these leaders then explained the process of discerning the plan’s specifics. Throughout, the chapter pinpoints how this gospel spread to millions of students, laity, and leaders across America and the world. In 1965, shortly after Mears died, Bright crystallized the message in the opening lines of *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?*—the world’s most-disseminated gospel tract, with perhaps three billion copies and dozens of translations in circulation.²

Set between 1947 and 1965, the chapter situates the gospel of God’s plan within America’s Cold War religious revival, marked by rising church attendance and construction, Civil Religion, and the “new evangelicalism” represented by Graham.³ As Communism stoked anxiety, the G.I. Bill and an economic boom spurred suburbanization, mass consumer culture, and the expansion of the (white) middle class.⁴ Within this context, the gospel of

¹ See ch. 3, 110.

² *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1965), CRU Archives (hereafter, CRUA). Bill Bright, *Come Help Change the World* (Peachtree City, GA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1999), 60. On the tract’s cultural and religious significance, see David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 15-31

³ This periodization follows Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), vii.

⁴ Helpful histories of this era’s culture and religion include Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free*; Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against*

God's plan touted the superiority of evangelicalism over Communist atheism, nominal Protestantism, and American materialism. At the same time, this gospel resonated with popular psychology, one of the postwar era's most enduring trends.

I. Origins of the Gospel of God's Plan

The gospel of God's plan originated in the June 1947 Awakening at Forest Home campgrounds in the southern California hills, led by Mears and a handful of her "boys." Of her numerous mentees, Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) founder Bill Bright's significance to postwar evangelicalism has been established,⁵ while Richard Halverson's has been neglected, despite his later renown as U.S. Senate Chaplain (1981-95). In 1935 Halverson migrated from North Dakota to southern California to chase Hollywood stardom; he found Christ instead.⁶ Under L. David Cowie, pastor of Los Angeles's Vermont Avenue Presbyterian Church and another Mears protégé, Halverson converted and sensed that God "had a definite plan for his life" involving Christian service. He enrolled at Wheaton College in 1937, earning a business degree before matriculating at Princeton Theological Seminary. Receiving the B.Th. degree in 1942, Halverson jumped between California and Kansas over the proceeding five years, directing Mears's Forest Home Conference Center and pastoring churches. In June 1947 he accompanied his colleagues at First Presbyterian Church of Coalinga, California, at the annual, Mears-led Teacher Training Conference at Forest Home,

Communism in the Early Cold War (New York: Oxford, 2011); Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-65* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-65* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Billy Graham in the Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); George M. Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); and, Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁵ John Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), is the standard scholarly study of the movement and will be cited extensively here.

⁶ Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 208-209.

the weekend she delivered her grim, first-hand impressions of war-torn Europe.⁷ Passing by her room the night of her talk, he joined her, Bright, and Hollywood Presbyterian Pastor Louis H. Evans for prayer, and the group shared a vision of evangelizing university students worldwide. In the middle of the night he drafted four commitment statements for the “Fellowship of the Burning Heart.”⁸ In the final statement, Fellowship members dedicated themselves to training the next generation of Christian leaders, to being “expendables” for Christ, and to seeking “God’s perfect will” in their lives, which for Halverson meant resigning from Coalinga Presbyterian. As summer progressed, he accepted Louis Evans’s offer of a one-year position in youth outreach at Hollywood Presbyterian and helped Mears organize the inaugural College Briefing Conference, a week-long gathering for outstanding, Christian students to join the Fellowship in surrendering their lives and careers to God’s service.

The co-founder of Halverson’s Fellowship of the Burning Heart Bill Bright, migrated to Los Angeles in 1944, seeking fortune and possibly fame during the wartime boom.⁹ “When I moved to California,” he later reminisced, “with dreams of making big money and enjoying all the trappings of material success, I had no idea God had a far better plan for me.”¹⁰ After visiting his landlord’s church, Hollywood Presbyterian, in 1945, he heard Mears teach about Paul’s Damascus Road conversion and prayer, “Lord, what will you have me do?” Bright recalled her words in his autobiography: “This is one of the most

⁷ Earl A. Roe, *Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), 273-80.

⁸ See ch. 3, 109.

⁹ Darren Dochuk includes Bright among the wave of mid-century economic migrants who came to southern California from the Great Plains, ultimately transforming Orange County into a Republican Party stronghold. See Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 176-79. For more biographical information on Bright before CCC, see Turner, Bill Bright, 13-39; Michael Richardson, *Amazing Faith: The Authorized Biography of Bill Bright* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2000), 18-61; Richard Quebedeaux, *I Found it! The Story of Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1979).

¹⁰ Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 21.

important questions you can possibly ask of God...The happiest people in the world are those who are in the center of God's will. The most miserable are those who are not doing God's will."¹¹ Mears's exhortation inspired Bright to recite Paul's words later that night as his own "prayer for salvation."¹² Convinced Jesus had "come into [his] life," he joined the College Department's evangelistic deputation teams. Then, sensing a ministry call (which Mears encouraged), he enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary in autumn 1946. After ailing business ventures prompted an early departure from Princeton in November, the 1947 Forest Home Awakening inspired him to join Fuller Seminary's first graduating class.¹³ His academic work suffered while he focused on intensive evangelistic outreach. With Demarest, Bright led the president of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) student body to faith. With Halverson, Bright formed a Friday-night deputation team in 1948.¹⁴ That year's College Briefing Conference was a milestone for Bright, whose fiancée, Vonette, came to Christ through Mears's counsel; the couple married in December.¹⁵ The 1949 Conference was equally pivotal: Mid-week, guest speaker Graham preached so passionately and authoritatively that hundreds of attendees dedicated their lives to Christian service.¹⁶ Less than two months later, his Los Angeles Crusade made him and born-again Christianity

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On the 1947 Forest Home Awakening's effect on Bright, see Turner, *Bill Bright*, 13-39; Richardson, *Amazing Faith*, 18-61; Roe, ed., *Dream Big! The Henrietta Mears Story*, 280-89.

¹⁴ Turner, 34.

¹⁵ Vonette recounts her skepticism of evangelical Christianity and the fateful conversation with Mears in Vonette Bright, *For Such a Time as This* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 20-22.

¹⁶ See Roe, *Dream Big*, 303.

famous.¹⁷ Against this backdrop, in spring 1951 Bright abandoned both his seminary and business career for a more fitting, activist calling: the parachurch.¹⁸

Halverson followed a similar trajectory. From the start of his HPC tenure in October 1947, he rarely occupied the pulpit, instead leading outreach initiatives and Bible studies for young adults. In November 1948, he joined HPC-sponsored missionaries in China, where he ministered to university students and, like numerous 1940s evangelicals, sensed God calling him to full-time foreign missionary service. However, upon returning to California in winter 1949, he determined that God had assigned him to a unique post on the home front.¹⁹ Curiously enough, a dental appointment confirmed his conviction. Halverson's dentist, an active HPC layman named James Sheets, had been asked to lead the primary school board of his Los Angeles suburb, a position that would curtail his church service. At first resentful toward the "city of Inglewood and all the citizens who were going to rob the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood of one of its finest men," Halverson's attitude softened by the appointment's end.²⁰ He told Sheets he could not think of a more "wonderful" calling for a Christian, musing, "Just think, if every school board in every city had a godly man as

¹⁷ On Graham's Los Angeles Crusade and sudden celebrity, see Wacker, "Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Revival," *Turning Points in American Evangelicalism*, ed. Heath Carter, Laura Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 226-46.

¹⁸ To Dochuk, Bright and CCC exemplified the characteristic "inventiveness" of southern California's postwar parachurch ministries. See Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 178-79. Robert Wuthnow argues that the post-1945 proliferation of parachurch organizations, or special-purpose groups working alongside established churches, coincided with the decline in denominationalism and increasing strength of popular evangelicalism, factors contributing to the post-1970s conservative-liberal structure in religion and politics. See Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989), 3-13, 100-32, *passim*.

¹⁹ Although no full-length biography of Halverson exists, V. Raymond Edman included him in a 1956-59 series of testimonies featured in *Christian Life*, later compiled into a book. See Edman, *They Found the Secret: Twenty Transformed Lives that Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 78-86.

²⁰ Halverson, "The Church that Penetrates Society," in *Why—In the World? The Dynamics of Spiritual Renewal*, ed. Harvey C. Warner (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1965), 6.

its president.”²¹ This experience inspired him to develop a “specialist” ministry to lay professionals in the community.

With the title Pastor of Leadership Education, he sought to reach “secular man”—meaning both evangelical and non-evangelical men working in secular fields—in the hopes of turning the former into leaders and the latter into sincere Christians. He taught weeknight house Bible studies geared to businessmen, medical doctors, and automobile workers, while also serving as chaplain for the Hollywood Christian Group.²² In 1949 he began distributing *Perspective: A Bi-Weekly Devotional Newsletter for Businessmen* to his Hollywood-area constituency. Each one-page newsletter was pithy and practical, presenting Christian truths through extended metaphors drawn from business and leadership. Thus, by the early 1950s Halverson and Bright began fulfilling Mears’s call to raise a new generation of Christian leaders by reaching “men and women of influence.”²³ As Halverson focused on adult professionals, he helped Bright win the “big man on campus”—the fraternity member, class president, star athlete, and his (supportive) female counterpart. This wider context shaped the message of God’s plan Bright carried to UCLA, one of the nation’s most elite and secular institutions, in autumn 1951.

Crusade’s Early Years: 1951-57

When Bright established Campus Crusade for Christ in 1951, he included Mears, Halverson, Graham, J. Edwin Orr, and Fuller professor Wilbur Smith, who coined the

²¹ Halverson, “The Church that Penetrates Society,” 7.

²² Halverson, “Why I came to Fourth Presbyterian Church,” [n.d., ca 1960], The Navigators Discipleship Library Online. http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/search.php?a=0&e=1&m=0&n=0&p=0&s=last_name&t=LAST%20NAME (Accessed June 5, 2017). Halverson also was called “Pastor of New Life and Evangelism.” See Ralph Hamburger to J.B. Phillips, August 23, 1952, Berlin Fellowship Records, Fuller Seminary Archives.

²³ Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 15. Bright was not the only postwar-evangelical leader to pursue this strategy. See, for example, Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

organization's name (claiming God had revealed the letters, "CCC," to him).²⁴ The debut issue of *Campus Crusade Communique* summarized the events of the 1951-52 academic year after the original UCLA campaign in autumn, attributing its success to a group who chose "to discipline themselves in prayer and holy living," an allusion to the Fellowship of the Burning Heart. The second page featured a ringing endorsement from Graham: "No mission field on the face of the earth is more needy than the college and university campuses of America. Nor is there more potential field for service.... 'Campus Crusade for Christ' is an instrument of God to meet the challenge which collegiate America faces."²⁵

In his own introductory note, Bright compared CCC to the Student Volunteer Movement in seeking the conversion of "thousands" of students and potential "ambassadors to a needy world."²⁶ IVCF's claim to the Student Volunteer Movement's mantle was more accurate. True to their respective names, whereas IVCF was a fellowship of Christian students, CCC was an evangelistic outreach to non-Christian students.²⁷ While IVCF's constituency prioritized overseas mission fields, CCC's leaders labored, in the words of its first slogan, to win the campus today to win the world tomorrow.²⁸

Communique's student testimonies reflected Bright's strategy for winning the campus, as they emphasized the "wonderful" happiness and purpose experienced immediately after surrendering to Christ. These first converts presented the faith in rosy tones—intentionally, by using such florid language, and perhaps unintentionally, by boasting

²⁴ Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 36.

²⁵ Graham, *Communique*, 1951-52 Special Edition, 2. Grant Wacker, "Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Revival," *Turning Points in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 226-46. Impressed by the evangelist's stance against immorality and Communism, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst told his editors to give the Crusade positive coverage.

²⁶ Bright, *Communique*, 1951-52 Special Edition.

²⁷ See also Keith and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in the USA, 1940-90* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 151-52.

²⁸ *Communique*, 1951-52 Special Edition.

enviable lives. In the debut issue, three (male) deputation leaders reported awakenings at UCLA and nearby universities. Ted Nisson, a UCLA student-body leader turned CCC evangelist recounted his conversion: “Not long ago I was the same as many others, no real purpose in life. Existing, but not really living until I became interested in CCC. This movement is the means by which ‘new life’ can be given to the thousands of college students.” UCLA sorority member Lorna Hendrickson, an upstanding yet discontented student, received Christ as “personal Savior” and discovered joyful, “new meaning” in life; it was “infinitely broader and more wonderful than before,” with “each day” full of “hope, courage, love and happiness.” *Communique* testimonies were remarkably uniform, often beginning with the student’s nod to a nominally Christian faith that had been suppressed by materialism or social ambition. A growing sense of emptiness, apathy, or disillusionment prompted the student’s conversion to a heartfelt, evangelical faith after hearing a CCC evangelist. As the testimonies revealed, members rarely hailed from an atheistic or other religious background.

The testimony of UCLA All-American quarterback Don Moomaw epitomized the CCC conversion narrative—a spiritual success story of the already successful.²⁹ Aiming to lend evangelical faith a more virile image, Bright heavily promoted renowned athletes who had found Christ through the organization. Moomaw further delighted Bright when he declined offers to play football professionally to pursue an M.Div. at Princeton Seminary. The February 1954 *Communique* reported his goodbye party—held in Mears’s mansion adjacent to UCLA’s campus—during which he told guests that a CCC meeting led him to realize, “for the first time in his life,” that Jesus was the “Son of God and our Savior, with a

²⁹ The phrase “conversion narrative” refers to Bruce Hindmarsh’s study of eighteenth-century evangelicals whose private writings and public confessions for church membership demonstrated common features. See Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

plan for every life.” Soon thereafter, he made a “touchdown for the Lord...when Christ became the Lord and Master of his life.”³⁰

Communique recruited new male staffers through a recurring notice asserting, variously, that 95% of university students had “no active affiliation with Christ or the church” or knew nothing of “God’s plan for their lives.”³¹ Meanwhile, throughout the 1950s national surveys indicated that over 95% of Americans professed belief in God, over half of Americans regularly attended church, and church membership was increasing faster than the general population to a high of 69% in 1960.³² Either pollsters neglected collegians, or perhaps Bright had little regard for nominal Christianity.

The male-directed calls to service in no way mitigated the overwhelming implication of CCC testimonies: Surrendering to Christ did not require surrendering one’s popularity or achievements, only anxiety about the future. As Barbara Watkins put it in the January 1955 *Communique*, “I surrendered my life to Christ and asked Him to take my will completely. From that time on Jesus Christ has been holding the plans for my future...In the place of uncertainty Christ has given me assurance and peace.”³³ “Christ is Guide,” featured in the 1956 Special Edition, displayed one weakness of CCC’s gospel: Recounting God’s providential plan allowed one to boast, unashamedly. “All through school many honors have come my way,” admitted sorority girl and CCC hostess Barbara Ellis, continuing:

I was what almost every girl dreams of being, a college homecoming queen, a princess several times and a songleader here at UCLA. But, you see, I didn’t acquire these honors alone; it was God Who gave them to me. It was my earnest prayer in every honor I sought to obtain, that if I was awarded it, that Christ would have the glory, and that people might be able to see and know of my love for him....I am

³⁰ *Communique*, February 1954.

³¹ *Communique*, “Most Strategic Field in the World, April 1953; *Communique*, “Campus Crusade Needs Men!” May 1954.

³² For quantitative and qualitative evidence of a postwar religious boom, see Ellwood, *The Fifties*, 6-26.

³³ Barbara Watkins, “Surrendered,” *Communique*, January 1955, CRUA.

truly thankful for a successful college life...but most of all...thankful for the greatest thrill in life, that of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Master.³⁴

Some entries were particularly saccharine. In “Beautiful New World,” a 1957 testimony, Terri White gushed, “Do you know what it is like to feel as if there is so much love and happiness inside you that it’s going to explode any minute—as if you are part of a wonderful plan? This is Christianity.”³⁵ University of Texas student Anne Elkins found it “impossible to express in words the joy that is mine because Jesus has a plan for my life which he unfolds to me daily.”³⁶

Male members’ testimonies, while typically less cloying, were equally simplistic. After achieving everything but contentment, Tom McFarland found Christ to be the “answer to all” of his problems. “Only He could bring me what I wanted from life.” Don Barnes recalled CCC evangelists’ promise that “a person having Christ as a partner has a purpose in life.”³⁷ UCLA student Greg Barnett recounted how years struggling with unhappiness and an “inferiority complex” went away upon accepting Jesus. Barnett’s favorite verse was Philippians 4:13, invoked by numerous CCC converts. “In every task I face I say those great words to myself and pray for guidance,” Barnett explained, “and you know, I don’t believe in magic, but I sure do believe in God’s magic!”³⁸ Following Moomaw’s touchdown for Jesus, University of Southern California fullback Don Johnson said in 1957, “Everybody can’t be an All-American on the football field, but every Christian can be an All-American for God.”³⁹

³⁴ Barbara Ellis, “Christ is Guide,” *Communique*, 1956 Special Edition, CRUA.

³⁵ Terri White, “Beautiful New World,” *Communique*, 1957 Special Edition, CRUA.

³⁶ Anne Elkins, *Communique*, 1957 Special Edition, CRUA.

³⁷ Tom McFarland and Don Barnes, *Communique*, February 1953, CRUA.

³⁸ Greg Barnett, *Communique*, February 1954.

³⁹ Don Johnson, *Communique*, 1957.

In sum, between 1951 and 1957 CCC's deputation leaders and converts began spreading a cheery gospel of God's plan throughout major university campuses. Although primarily focused on saving souls, Bright also sought to conquer the rampant radicalism he detected on campuses such as UCLA.⁴⁰ Virulent anti-Communism, as has been well documented, pervaded postwar evangelicalism. Compared to militantly McCarthyite fundamentalists like Carl McIntire, Bright and other Graham-style evangelicals preferred moderate, less overtly political tactics.⁴¹ Proclaiming that God had a wonderful, purposeful plan for every life might convince a skeptic that Christianity was superior to Marxism—a strategy Bright showcased to his deep-pocketed friends in the Los Angeles business community. The January 1955 *Communique* reprinted excerpts from a *Hollywood Citizen News* article on his recent speech to the North Hollywood Kiwanis Club (a fraternal organization dedicated to children's causes). Bright, identified as a "businessman," reportedly taught that "man was not a creature of chance but...created by God to have a part in his marvelous plan." He then warned, "We know that man will either follow the true God or he will follow a false one. Either students will serve the true God or they will follow materialism and communism."⁴²

Richard Halverson's "Perspective" on God's Plan

Bright established a particularly auspicious connection with International Christian Leadership (ICL) in Washington, D.C. Seattle-based Methodist minister Abraham Vereide, a Norwegian immigrant, founded ICL in 1942 (incorporated in Chicago as the Fellowship

⁴⁰ Turner, 43-45.

⁴¹ See Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams, Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford, 2007); Matthew Sutton, "Becoming Cold Warriors for Christ," in *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2014), 293-325. See also Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 102-103.

⁴² *Communique*, January 1955. On Bright's close ties to prominent, politically conservative businessmen and other anti-communist activists during the late 1950s and early '60s, see Turner, 63-64, 107-11.

Foundation) to unite businessmen across the country and world in local prayer breakfast groups.⁴³ After relocating ICL from Chicago to the nation's capital in 1944, Vereide organized a Presidential Prayer Breakfast for the first week of February 1953, welcoming the just-inaugurated Dwight Eisenhower. An annual D.C. tradition thereafter, the doctrinally inclusive National Prayer Breakfast hosted every sitting President from Eisenhower onward an elite cadre of political, industrial, and clerical leaders. In early 1953 Bright established CCC as an ICL branch in the university world, and Vereide began courting Halverson to join the executive team.⁴⁴ Though declining, Halverson addressed the Los Angeles "Breakfast Club," an ICL affiliate, in October 1953 on the importance of evangelizing the university.⁴⁵ Appointed Hollywood Field Representative of ICL in 1954,⁴⁶ the pastor spoke at three Prayer Breakfasts before accepting the ICL Board's formal invitation to be Associate Executive Director in 1956, relocating to the nation's capital in May.⁴⁷ In November 1956 the Los Angeles-based Cowman Publications, who had a close relationship with Mears, released his first book, *Christian Maturity*, which was subsequently reprinted seven times. In 1957 Cowman released a compilation of 120 *Perspective* selections, boosting the newsletter's circulation from 4,000 in 1956 to 7,500 in 1960.⁴⁸ Together, these volumes

⁴³ Norman Grubb, *Modern Viking: The Life of Abraham Vereide, Pioneer of Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961). David Miller places Vereide and ICL within the postwar "Ministry of the Laity" era (1946-85) of a loose twentieth-century movement he calls "Faith at Work," led by individuals and special-purpose groups reflecting upon the theological significance of work and the marketplace. See Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42-43.

⁴⁴ ICL Newsletter, February 1953, BGCA.

⁴⁵ "L.A. Breakfast Club Hears About Campus Crusade for Christ," *Communique*, November 1953.

⁴⁶ ICL Newsletter, March 1954, BGCA.

⁴⁷ ICL Newsletter, March 1956; ICL Newsletter, June 1956, BGCA.

⁴⁸ Although the book was not billed as a "compilation," in 1962 Halverson pitched to Cowman a "new edition of *Perspective* letters [called *Perspective* #2]." See Halverson to Cowman Publishers, March 8, 1962, Fellowship Foundation Papers, box 509, folder 11, Fellowship Foundation Records, BGCA.

captured the message Halverson had been honing since his dentist-chair epiphany—God’s plan for the businessman.

It is important to clarify Halverson’s target audience. Although he dedicated *Perspective* “to faithful Christian laymen who with silent heroism under relentless secular pressure fight the economic battle as stewards of the living God,” he considered many of those laymen effectively secularized in their inability to apply Sunday-morning faith to Monday-Friday enterprise.⁴⁹ The book’s second entry, “Leadership is a mission field,” illuminated this. Halverson claimed that leadership was “perhaps the most difficult mission field,” adding, “Nominal Christians are a mission field, also.”⁵⁰ The gospel *Perspective* propagated to leaders and nominal Christians held that the most accomplished, composed men were those who submitted their professional and personal pursuits to God’s control. Couched in mostly non-theological language drawn from industry, management, and executive leadership, and referencing current events and popular periodicals, *Perspective* entries stressed salvation through personal faith, the daily Quiet Time’s importance for providing “perspective,” and the real-world benefits of following God’s will.

The entry, “God will lead you,” recalled a friend “at a cross roads,” desperate to know God’s plan for his life. “Still young—but not young enough to keep changing from one business to another. Time he was settling down. He’d been successful at everything...but was dogged by a restlessness—a feeling he was not where he belonged.” Fortunately, for readers facing the same uncertainty, “The Bible makes it quite explicit that God has a plan for every man! Jesus Christ spoke of this in a hundred different ways. It was the theme of the Apostles and the Old Testament Prophets.” However, God would not “impose His plan” upon anyone, as a man was “free” to “reject” God’s will; there was

⁴⁹ Halverson, dedication page, *Perspective: Devotional Thoughts for Men* (Los Angeles: Cowman Publications, 1957).

⁵⁰ Idem, “Leadership is a Mission Field,” *Perspective*, 2.

nothing “‘fatalistic’ or inescapable” about it. Referencing the familiar Psalm 37:5, he concluded, “This is God’s plan for every man—for you: COMMIT YOUR LIFE TO HIM. Surrender to His will daily. Ratify that surrender as often as necessary. Yield to His will—*He guarantees it!* [all emphases original].”⁵¹ The “surest, steadiest, most dependable men are GOD-CONTROLLED MEN,” he said elsewhere. Skid-row, on the other hand, was filled with “broken men—*without a goal*—a purpose.”⁵² Rebels against God’s control were “sub-human!...like a fish out of water.”⁵³

“Providence,” the title of an entry based on Romans 8.28 and Psalm 37.5, encouraged men to view God as their everyday problem-solver. Able to see the “end from the beginning,” and “all the stages in between,” God had “angles a man would never think of.” He was like “an architect—who sees the *finished product*.” While the “secular man *looks around* at his circumstances,” seeking escape, “THE CHRISTIAN MAN LOOKS UP—TO GOD!” Therefore, “*When things look blackest*—LOOK UP! GOD IS ABLE.”⁵⁴ God was the ultimate time-manager. His “perfect plan for your life,” Halverson explained, involved a “perfect goal—a perfect process whereby this goal is to be realized—and a perfect schedule for its operation and completion.”⁵⁵ Consequently, men needed to be patient while waiting for the “*exciting adventure*” to unfold. Like a traveler who was “sure of his destination,” half of the adventure lay in the unseen twists and turns, since knowing every mile of the route would bring only “boredom!” Life, overall, was “never so interesting as

⁵¹ Idem, “God will lead you,” *Perspective*, 74.

⁵² Idem, “Man under control,” *Perspective*, 56.

⁵³ Idem, “Why Pray?” *Perspective*, 33.

⁵⁴ Idem, “Providence,” *Perspective*, 42.

⁵⁵ Idem, “God’s Will Involves Schedule,” *Perspective*, 46.

when one takes the will of God seriously and walks in it!”⁵⁶ In addition to “confidence and strength,” following God’s plan beget “real freedom—real efficiency—real productivity.”⁵⁷

Countering Marxism, the *Perspective* newsletter championed the free market’s divine providentialism, reflecting the camaraderie between postwar American evangelicalism and the corporate sector.⁵⁸ “Spiritual Economics,” for example, asserted that the “law of supply and demand works in the realm of the spirit too.” Since God possessed infinite resources, “Every Christian man is where he is *because God wants to use him as a point of distribution,*” or, “*the meeting place of God’s supply and man’s need.*”⁵⁹ Money, an unavoidable part of the divine economy, was neither “blessing” nor “curse”; instead, money was “*coined talent and energy and time,*” in fact, coined “*life.*” Earned wages dedicated to “kingdom enterprise” symbolized a man’s “effort and ingenuity and achievement,” his “best consecrated to the highest” (a reference to Oswald Chambers devotional classic).⁶⁰ Ultimately, though, God did not want a businessman’s money, time, or talent but his very self. Thus, when he fully aligned his will to God’s, in its “process,” “schedule,” and final “product,” the faithful businessman accessed the “KEY TO PERSONAL POWER—maturity—freedom—efficiency—and *maximum productivity.*” Not simply spiritual, his reward was quantifiable. In addition to praising the free market, Halverson trusted that born-again Christianity could stand against Communism. As he maintained in the preface to

⁵⁶ Idem, “God’s Will, *Perspective*, 82.

⁵⁷ Idem, “God-Planned Life,” *Perspective*, 63.

⁵⁸ Recent scholarship has highlighted this trend. See, for example, Darren Grem, *The Blessings of Business: Corporate America and the Rise of Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵⁹ Halverson, “Spiritual Economics,” *Perspective*, 5.

⁶⁰ Idem, “Money: Blessing or Curse?” *Perspective*, 28.

Christian Maturity, “men indwelt and ruled by Christ are invincible, a match for any crisis, the key to the quiet desperation that holds the world in shock.”⁶¹

In the microcosmic and macrocosmic sense, it was “irresistible logic” that “a man is *most a man* when he gives himself to God and *lines up with God’s program*.” He “enters into his *true destiny* when he invests everything he can in the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose!”⁶² The entry “Future Guaranteed” emphatically depicted the contrast between the man who missed God’s plan for his life, and the man who found it. First, Halverson pronounced judgment on the former:

There is no more pathetic tragedy than the MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN...the man who *spent himself at the wrong task*—a square peg in a round hole. Just when some legitimate returns should be coming in he discovers he’s been barking up the wrong tree...*going down the wrong road* that leads to...nowhere! It is great when young fellows can figure this out *early enough*. Pity the man who carries on with blinders because he won’t think—or can’t...or because *he’s willing to settle for mediocrity* and the second best...He reaches forty-five and finds himself at the end of the hallway with no door. All he can do is dig in and make the best of a second-rate finish. This is the tragedy of tragedies...because *it is utterly unnecessary!* This man has to accept the second best for himself! There’s *a place in the sun for every man* and it’s his own fault if he misses it!

Then he shared the good news:

God has a plan for your life! And when a man’s life is God-planned, he’ll find the place where he belongs—the place where the pay off is right...IF he *consents to God’s will!* He’ll find the place of fulfillment: A productive—fruitful—*completely satisfying life* now and forever...*providing he lets God lead!* *This plan for your life is perfect*—down to the microscopic details. If you miss it, don’t blame God. God’s plan means complete and perfect fulfillment of the man: Every [gift] with which he is endowed—every built-in aptitude gets its proper [use]. *A man becomes himself in the fullest sense of the word* when his life is God led.⁶³

⁶¹ Idem, preface to *Christian Maturity* (Los Angeles: Cowman Publications, 1956).

⁶² Idem, “Kingdom Enterprise,” *Perspective*, 26.

⁶³ Idem, “Future Guaranteed,” *Perspective*, 35.

He closed with the phrase, “Therefore let go...and LET GOD!” a favorite benediction of Victorious Life leader Charles G. Trumbull. The entry’s theme verse was another familiar passage on guidance, Psalm 32:23, “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.”⁶⁴

In *Christian Maturity*, Halverson aimed similar critiques at 1950s American religion—numerically strong but, in his view, spiritually enervated. Conversations with secular, mainline Protestant, and even evangelical men had led him to conclude that, for many, faith had become a “performance” rather than an “experience.”⁶⁵ Only constant, internal dependence upon the Holy Spirit guaranteed spiritual renewal and maturity. As with *Perspective*, he targeted men who, while familiar with the Christian religion, were strangers to authentic faith. His climactic fifth chapter explained the “good news” for the professional man—not how to attain eternal life but, as the title promised, “How to Become Yourself.” He expounded this gospel of God’s plan as follows:

In the great Art Institutes of the world there are originals which are priceless. They are the work of the artist himself, bearing his strokes with his brushes and his paint on his canvas. But often in the department stores one may pick up a cheap copy of these originals at a tiny fraction of their cost. God has a plan for every man’s life. The plan is distinctive for him. In it he becomes himself, fulfills himself. When he allows this plan to be operative he becomes the Divine original that God intended. When he refuses to allow God to direct his life, he turns out to be but a copy, worth only a tiny fraction of his true value. God has built into man’s life those qualities that are distinctive and He knows how they may be developed and polished and made to produce. Aptitude tests and counsellors may help, but God alone can bring out the original with its distinctive features. Only God can guarantee that a man will become himself.⁶⁶

Men who failed to exploit their unique potential were an “irreparable loss,” succumbing to “the tragedy of the ‘might-have-been.’”

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Halverson, *Christian Maturity*, 27, 41-42.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 135-36.

Inner Direction, Positive Thinking, and the Therapeutic Turn

Halverson's paean to individuality, authenticity, and non-conformity echoed mainstream cultural voices. In 1950, David Riesman's seminal study of the postwar American character, *The Lonely Crowd*, bemoaned the growing dominance of the "other-directed" person, who mindlessly followed societal norms, over the "inner-directed" person, who exuded the signature, self-reliant American character by following his own moral convictions. Rapid suburbanization after the war, according to Riesman, had precipitated the shift, as young, upwardly mobile couples imbibed mass opinions and tastes.⁶⁷ In 1956, the year *Christian Maturity* appeared, business journalist Walter Whyte released *The Organization Man*, a sardonic commentary on the new corporate minion, whose suburban private life was shaped by the "organization church," which preached the gospel of "belonging" to a group.⁶⁸ Though not explicitly referencing these landmark studies, *Christian Maturity* offered a Christianized antidote to conformity that lauded the man whose life and values were directed by God instead of mass culture, suburban neighbors, or nominal Protestantism.

"How to Become Yourself," alongside other Halverson writings, exhibited postwar Americans' new, shared obsession: self-realization. During the so-called "therapeutic turn," humanistic psychology supplanted both Freudianism and Augustinian theology as the dominant, popular paradigm for interpreting the self.⁶⁹ "Self-actualization," the mantra of humanistic psychology, entered into mainstream American culture between 1949 and 1961

⁶⁷ On the book's significance to the twentieth century, see Todd Gitlin, foreword to David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, Abr., 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001 [1961]), 13-21. See also Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs*, 87-91; Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 64-75.

⁶⁸ Walter Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: A Touchstone book [Simon and Schuster], 1956), 365-81 and passim. See also Hudnut-Beumler, 3-8, 91-97; Marsden, 75-78; Ellwood, *The Fifties*, ch. 4.

⁶⁹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). See also Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, 72-93; Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free*, 185-219; Petigny, *The Permissive Turn*, 15-52.

through the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.⁷⁰ By the 1950s evangelicals had begun to embrace psychology's descriptive insights and practical usefulness, albeit not as enthusiastically as mainline Protestants.⁷¹ Bright exemplified the trend. In 1957 he appointed pioneering evangelical psychologist Clyde Narramore to CCC's Board of Directors.

Narramore, who held a doctorate of education from Columbia University, served as Research and Guidance Consultant for the massive (nearly 1.5 million students in 1958) Los Angeles County public school system. Since 1954 he had hosted a nationally syndicated radio show, "Psychology for Living," published a corresponding journal, and released manuals for pastors and laity that received positive reviews in evangelical periodicals.⁷² The psychology-ministry crossover went both ways. In "God's Will for Your Life," originally published in a series for teens, *Young Only Once* (1957), Narramore took full passages from Halverson's *Perspective*, proclaiming, for instance, "When you yield to His will, He does the leading. He guarantees it! There's nothing mysterious about the will of God. It's like taking a trip. Following God's way is an *exciting adventure*."⁷³ *This Way to Happiness* (1958)—which expressed "appreciation" to Halverson for more "thoughts from his [bi]-weekly newsletter, *Perspective*"—harmonized humanistic psychology with evangelical soteriology. "Everyone wants to be happy," Narramore wrote in the introduction, and with unprecedented knowledge, affluence, and leisure time, "people the world over are devising ingenious methods and going in every direction to find happiness." He continued:

When skilled psychologists and psychiatrists probe into the innermost feelings of man, they find basic psychological needs that demand fulfillment. Just as people have physical necessities—food, shelter and clothing, so they have definite psychological needs. 'People,' the specialists agree, 'cannot possibly function at their best, or find *real happiness until these needs are met*.' What are these needs?

⁷⁰ Petigny, 273-74.

⁷¹ See Stevens, p. 381 n. 72. See also Stephanie Muravchak, *American Protestantism in the Age of Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷² Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 144-54.

⁷³ Clyde Narramore, "God's Will for Your Life," in *The Life Guide Series: Selected Works of Clyde M. Narramore, Ed.D.*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969 [orig., 1957]), 57.

And how are they satisfied? As you identify your psychological needs and take steps to meet them, you will say, ‘This is the way to happiness.’⁷⁴

Chapter subjects paralleled Maslow’s own Hierarchy of Needs, specifically its categories of security, belonging, and love. The final two chapters, “secrets to success,” and “faith that endures,” seemed to reference the Hierarchy’s ultimate growth stages, “self-actualization” and “self-transcendence.” Narramore maintained that the secret to individual success came “not from natural attributes nor from worldly acclaim but from being in the will of God.” When God was “in charge, there can be no failures,” meaning, “Every sincere child of God can be and should be a success.” He glossed on the increasingly ubiquitous Phil. 4.13, “What a wonderful thought—to know that we as believers have this special, supernatural help to make us successful.”⁷⁵

Thus, by the late 1950s, Narramore and Halverson were reaching broad audiences with the good news that, through surrendering to Christ, one could achieve success, happiness—in short, self-actualization. As evangelicals, these leaders acknowledged the divine superintendence of human destiny while still attributing significant agency to individual effort. Their work thus naturally evoked the 1952 book on its way to becoming a runaway bestseller, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Author Norman Vincent Peale, a liberal Dutch Reformed minister of Manhattan’s Marble Collegiate Church, predicated personal success and self-fulfillment upon practicing certain mental techniques, including repeating scripture verses (including Romans 12:2) as mantras for mental wellbeing and practicing a “prayerize, picturize, and actualize” process for achieving one’s dreams.⁷⁶ Halverson’s spiritual formula offered similar results, specifically the ability to achieve one’s highest potential. As Hollywood Presbyterian’s former pastor, Louis H. Evans, Sr., proclaimed in the

⁷⁴ Narramore, *This Way to Happiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁶ On Peale’s impact, see Christopher Lane, *Norman Vincent Peale and the Remaking of American Religious Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), esp. 1-5, 82-85; Carol V.R. George, *God’s Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

foreword to *Christian Maturity*, “In a time when the spirited search is one of power and performance, this work carries a thrilling answer.”⁷⁷

Graham, God’s Plan, and Postwar Revival

By the mid-1950s, God’s concern for the individual’s everyday problems and feelings constituted a major plank of Billy Graham’s message. His bestsellers *Peace with God* (1953) and *The Secret of Happiness* (1955) held that lasting personal contentment could be found only in a personal relationship with Jesus and obedience to the Bible.⁷⁸

Complementing his sunny, sanguine tone, Graham featured some of his southern-California friends on the stage. CCC’s Don Moomaw and Christian actress Colleen Townsend Evans (the first face of the Hollywood Christian Group), for example, spoke at the 1954 Harringay Stadium Crusade in London, with Mears in attendance.⁷⁹ Unless addressing a constituency such as YFC or IVCF, Graham sermonized on providence—in the personal, national, and cosmic sense—less often than more general evangelistic topics.⁸⁰ However, echoing Bright, Mears, and other Victorious Life-influenced evangelicals, he regularly emphasized the Lordship of Christ. Christ must be “Lord and Master of your life,” he told his London crowds, warning, “you cannot be Christian unless you let him.” Fortunately, surrender produced peace and happiness: “...how wonderful to relax in Christ. Let him run your life.

⁷⁷ Louis H. Evans, Sr., Preface, *Christian Maturity*. Evans authored books with similar themes. See Idem., *Life’s Hidden Power: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1958); Idem., *The Kingdom Is Yours* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1952).

⁷⁸ Graham, *Peace with God* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953), remains in print and has sold over two million copies. On the book’s themes, critical reviews, and heightened cultural significance compared to other Graham releases, see Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 161-63. Graham, *The Secret of Happiness: Jesus’ Teaching on Happiness as Expressed in the Beatitudes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955).

⁷⁹ J. Edwin Orr, *The Inside Story of the Hollywood Christian Group* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955), 125-27.

⁸⁰ This claim is based upon a perusal of sermon titles from 1950 to 1965 listed in the Records of the *Hour of Decision* radio program, BGCA, and titles of Graham’s pamphlet sermons, BGCA. According to Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 42-43, over the course of his career Graham increasingly emphasized God’s “superintendence over all nature and history” rather than special providences such as modern miracles.

Let Him take over.”⁸¹ In a talk on the Holy Spirit, Graham reiterated his sentiment, saying, “Oh, it’s wonderful when we face problems, choices, and decisions to leave it all to the Holy Spirit and know that He will guide you and lead you.”⁸²

In a late October 1956 broadcast on the *Hour of Decision*, his radio program heard by twenty million listeners via 150 radio stations nationwide each week, Graham proclaimed that divine guidance flowed out of God’s comprehensive plan for the believer’s life.⁸³ “Living in the Will of God,” recorded on location during his record-breaking St. Louis Crusade,⁸⁴ was distributed in a 1957 pamphlet entitled, “The Mystery of God’s Will.”⁸⁵ Since this message became his standard talk on PLP into the late 1950s and early 1960s, it will be discussed further below.⁸⁶ The important point here is that Graham, like Bright and Halverson, seized the potential of divine providence to spark conversion and revival. He opened:

One of the most thrilling things about studying the Bible is to know that the Infinite God has been pleased to share some of the secrets of His universe with His redeemed children. Sin has blinded men, and the average man sees life in a false perspective. But the truly born-again Christian sees life, not as a blurred, confused, meaningless mass, but as something planned and desirable, with a purpose.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Graham, “The Natural Man (1 Cor. 2:1-4),” London Harringay Crusade, March 8, 1954, Sermons of Billy Graham, BGCA.

⁸² Graham, “The Holy Spirit,” London Harringay Crusade, n.d., Sermons of Billy Graham, BGCA.

⁸³ Wacker, 15, 157-58.

⁸⁴ Graham, “Living in the Will of God,” *Hour of Decision*, October 28, 1956, tape 355j, CN 191, BGCA. As he claimed on the recorded broadcast, the 500,000 attendees over the preceding few weeks made the St. Louis crusade his largest yet.

⁸⁵ Idem, “The Mystery of God’s Will,” pamphlet sermon (Minneapolis, MN: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1957), BGCA. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the sermon come from the printed pamphlet.

⁸⁶ Idem, “God’s Will,” *Hour of Decision*, November 1, 1959, tape 512g, *Hour of Decision* Records, BGCA; Idem, “Finding God’s Will for Your Life,” December 2, 1962, tape 673g, *Hour of Decision* Records, BGCA. As the list of *Hour of Decision* sermons indicates, the content of “Mystery of God’s Will” became his standard message on PLP through at least the early 1960s.

⁸⁷ Graham, “The Mystery of God’s Will,” 1.

Acknowledging that many listeners wrote to him about knowing God's will, he maintained that the question had been the "heart's desire of devout men" throughout history. "The Bible reveals that God has a plan for every life, that if we live in constant fellowship with Him, He will direct and lead us in the fulfillment of this plan," he said. "There are many of us that have God's second or third best. We have missed God's perfect plan for our lives."⁸⁸ God's perfect will guaranteed contentment in poverty, "joy in obscurity," and "endurance" in suffering and persecution. Conversely, straying from God's will could bring "misery" in abundance, "wretched[ness]" in fame, and "agony" in suffering. "All of life," he declared, "swings on this divine hinge: the will of God," he declared.⁸⁹

The evangelistic hook appeared early. "Keep in mind," he clarified, "that God's perfect will is revealed only to born-again believers," a claim he supported with the Fellowship of the Burning Heart's theme verse, Romans 12:2. "If you want the perfect plan that God has for your life," he explained, "you will have to go by the way of Calvary to get it."⁹⁰ Before concluding, he again addressed listeners "outside" of God's will, seamlessly interweaving the temporal and eternal blessings of obtaining God's plan:

You were made for fellowship with God. God has worked out a fabulous blueprint for your life, and is patiently waiting to put it into operation. Some of you have already experienced heartache and disillusionment in the pursuit of your own selfish plans for your life. Your air castles have crumbled before your eyes, your hopes have been shattered, your dreams have not materialized. Life is like that when you are out of the will of God. We have just pointed out that it is not His will that any should perish, but that all should be brought to repentance. It is not His will that you suffer defeat after defeat. It is not His will that you live under the crushing weight of guilt. Christ stands at your heart's door today, saying: 'Come unto Me....and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11.28). Won't you dare to open the door and let Him in!⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

Issuing a sober reminder, he concluded:

Someday we shall stand before God. He will inspect His workmanship. Will He say of you: 'Just according to plan'? The blueprints of your life were drawn in heaven before you were born. God said concerning you: If this man or woman will bend his will to me at every turn of the road throughout life, not only will he find the greatest joy and fulfillment in life, but the entire universe throughout eternity will marvel at the workmanship of God.⁹²

Thus, by late 1956 Graham was preaching the gospel of God's plan into a culture yearning for purpose, peace, and fulfillment. Just as significant as the message's content was its intended audience. After the first Forest Home College Briefing Conference in 1947, Halverson and Bright spread the good news of God's "wonderful plan" beyond a hand-selected group of mature, high-achieving, evangelical university students to a larger body of student leaders and businessmen who were, at best, nominally Christian. In effect, these men used an insider evangelical discourse to evangelize outsiders. Graham went further: He democratized the message, making it accessible not only to leaders but to anyone with a radio. As the next section argues, starting in 1957, Bright became the first to mass-market the gospel of God's plan.

"God's Plan for You" and the Van Dusen Letter (1957-59)

During its first five years, CCC deputation leaders relied on a basic oral presentation of the gospel. Bright first transcribed this presentation upon the suggestion of the guest speaker for the summer 1957 staff training conference.⁹³ Bob Ringer, a successful CEO, chided Bright for not recognizing that he and his staffers likely said the same thing to every potential convert and, therefore, should spin the message into an attention-grabbing "sales pitch." Though initially offended by Ringer's seemingly crass treatment of the gospel, Bright

⁹² Ibid., 6.

⁹³ Richardson, *Amazing Faith*, 71, says 1956; Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 42-43, and Turner, 99, say the year was 1957.

drafted a twenty-minute message entitled “God’s Plan for You.”⁹⁴ Used throughout the organization by 1957, the text began by declaring humanity’s sinfulness before progressing to the good news, God’s plan for an abundant, joyous life in Christ. One night in spring 1958, while the Brights were still running CCC out of Mears’s home, he innovated again. At 2 am young female staffers were finishing typing the new God’s Plan script for distribution, when suddenly Bright bounded down the stairs to announce he had been “inspired” to modify the script. The revised version would lead off with the “good news,” which, in his well-known phrasing, stated, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” This order, he determined, better conveyed the thrust of CCC’s message. So troubled by what seemed like theological compromise—and probably also capricious disregard for their midnight labor—some staffers cried. But the revision stayed, so that the first official “God’s Plan for You” script, which introduced the “Four Spiritual Laws,” began as follows:⁹⁵

Every man is seeking happiness and fulfilment in life, but the Bible teaches that there is only one way to experience true happiness and complete fulfillment in life: that is through knowing and following God’s plan. The simplest way I know to explain what God’s plan is all about is through the use of the Four Spiritual Laws.⁹⁶

The first law, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” was explained as follows:

God did not plan for man to live a negative, miserable, defeated existence. Many people think that Christianity is either a very emotional, fanatical experience, or a religion that takes all of the fun out of life. They feel that if you are a Christian you have to be strait-laced, sober and sad. However, the Bible tells us that [quotes John 3.16]. The Bible also tells us that God meant man to live an abundant life—a life that is full and meaningful. Jesus said, ‘I am come that they might live, and that they might have it more abundantly’ (John 10.10).⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 44.

⁹⁵ Richardson, 73.

⁹⁶ Bright, “Exhibit 15: God’s Plan for You,” n.d., 1, CRUA.

⁹⁷ Bright, “God’s Plan for You,” 1.

By “wonderful,” Bright meant happiness, fulfillment, and spiritual abundance rather than a prosperity gospel. Yet his promises paralleled Pentecostal healing revivalist Oral Roberts, who in 1956 retitled his magazine *Healing*, circulated to over one million, *Abundant Life*.⁹⁸

After presenting this good news, Law Two stated that most people, “sinful and separated from God,” could not “know and experience God’s love and plan” for their lives.⁹⁹ Though traditional in its avowal of sin, Bright’s presentation featured a contemporary twist by omitting the *eternal* consequences of sin. The script stuck to temporal problems, namely, the ongoing failure of the “most ignorant savage to the most brilliant professor” to find God and a “life of purpose and happiness” through human efforts.¹⁰⁰ Law Three provided the solution to humanity’s quest in Jesus Christ, “God’s only provision for man’s sin.” It was only “through Him” that one could “know and experience God’s love and plan” for one’s life. Finally, Law Four explained that to obtain these blessings one must “individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”¹⁰¹

Along with reciting the “God’s Plan” script, CCC staff distributed a stand-alone tract which more concisely and emphatically introduced God’s plan. Formally copyrighted in 1959, it appears to have been used by staffers as early as summer 1957.¹⁰² Colloquially known as the “Van Dusen Letter,” the tract’s full title, “Dear Dr. Van Dusen, Your Life Can Become a Great Adventure,” supposedly referenced a real response Bright sent to a pseudonymous businessman (not Henry Pitney van Dusen, the ecumenical scholar) who had

⁹⁸ David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 130.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Watt, 15-31, interprets the Laws as a popular-level presentation of conversion, noting that they elicited criticism from within the evangelical movement.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² See box 40, folder 3, IVCF Records, BGCA. Outside of Billy Graham’s 1957 Madison Square Garden Crusade, which began in May, both IVCF and CCC manned follow-up evangelism tents to reach Crusade attendees. According to one IVCF staffer’s report to headquarters, Bright’s workers were circulating the Van Dusen letter.

inquired about Christianity.¹⁰³ Introducing the “basic facts concerning the Christian life,” the letter started, “First, I would like to have you think of the Christian life as a great adventure,” and cited John 10:10’s teaching on the abundant life.

“Second,” it continued, “I want you to know that God loves us and has a wonderful, exciting plan for every life. We are not creatures of chance, brought into the world for a meaningless, miserable existence; but rather, we are creatures of destiny, created for lives of purpose and joyful service.” Alluding to “spiritual laws,” the text argued from logic that God certainly had a plan for humanity, as follows:

Since man is the highest known form of life, and since there is a purpose for everything else, does it not make sense that there is a plan for us? If God created us for a purpose, does it not logically follow that that purpose somehow, somewhere, has been revealed? Would this One who created us then leave us to shift for ourselves? All evidence would demonstrate the contrary. How, then, can man know God’s plan?

The answer to humanity’s universal quest for “true happiness” was by following “God’s way” as revealed through the Bible.¹⁰⁴

The litany of “symptoms” of a “life separated from God” included “worry, irritability, lack of purpose in life, no goal, no power, no real interest in living, utter boredom, inferiority complex, frustration, desire to escape reality, and fear of death.” These conditions were “evidence that man is cut off from the only One who can give him the power to live the abundant life.” As in the “God’s Plan for You” script, the Van Dusen letter invoked famous quotations from St. Augustine and philosopher Blaise Pascal about humanity’s inherent need for God. Only He could raise “sinful, egocentric individuals” from the “lowest level” of living to “the highest plane, experiencing full and abundant lives as children of God.” Without spiritual rebirth and God’s indwelling presence, people could not “communicate with God” and, consequently, could know “nothing of his plan for our lives.”

¹⁰³ Van Dusen Letter (CCC, 1959), CRUA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Bright compared Christ to a TV set, in that He is “our divine instrument, tuning us into God, making known God’s will and love for our lives.”¹⁰⁵ The “God’s Plan” script used another technological image, that of a lamp and a light socket, to represent a person being “plugged into” God.¹⁰⁶ Mears had used this metaphor to evangelize Vonette Bright in 1948.¹⁰⁷

The Van Dusen letter featured Bright’s testimony. Recounting his “surrender” to God, he claimed to have felt no immediate emotional change but knew, for a fact, that “true to His promise, Christ came in.” Although “perfectly happy and challenged with life” beforehand, afterwards he possessed a “new quality of life altogether—a promise of abundant life fulfilled in ways too numerous to mention.” A series of visuals showed whose will sat on the “throne” of one’s life, namely “self” before surrender and “Christ” thereafter. Summarizing the “wonderful things” that would result from inviting Christ into one’s life, the letter concluded:

1. Christ will actually come to live in your heart.
2. Your sins will be forgiven.
3. You will truly become a child of God.
4. You are assured of heaven.
5. Your life becomes a great adventure, as God reveals His plan and purpose. (2 Cor 3.17, 1 Thess 5.18).¹⁰⁸

The two verses anchoring the fifth result helped clarify what Bright meant by the “great adventure” of God’s plan: possessing freedom through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3.17) and practicing continual thankfulness (1 Thess 5.18).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bright, “God’s Plan for You,” CRUA.

¹⁰⁷ Vonette Bright, *For Such a Time as This*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Van Dusen Letter.

With his enticing “sales pitch” and the follow-up Van Dusen Letter, Bright mass-distributed CCC’s gospel of God’s plan. To use sociologist George Ritzer’s term, he “McDonaldized” it, institutionalizing a predictable, controllable, efficient, and calculable model for winning converts and expanding CCC’s base.¹⁰⁹ Simply read a few scriptures, accept Jesus into one’s heart, and then surrender one’s will to God’s: The method was so straightforward and supposedly foolproof that the early script assumed that any listener, who endured until its conclusion, verbally assented to the basic propositions about Jesus Christ, and then invited Him into his heart through a staff-led prayer, in fact had become a “new Christian”—metaphysically. As the prompt instructed the evangelist, “Explain that this is the greatest decision he will ever make and that, as he prayed, many things happened,” including, “He began the great adventure for which God created him.”

The Gospel of God’s Plan and Neo-Evangelicalism:

Ephesians 1:9-11 and J. B. Phillips

In the latter 1950s, when the gospel of God’s plan started reaching elites and the masses, church membership and public religiosity continued to flourish. The additions of “One nation under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and “In God we Trust” to the dollar bill suggested, at least on the surface, an ongoing religious revival—though skepticism abounded.¹¹⁰ Graham-centered “neo-evangelicals” continued to gain respectability with the October 1956 debut of *Christianity Today*, their answer to the ecumenical *Christian Century*. In spring 1957, the evangelist cooperated with New York City’s mainline Protestants to host his Madison Square Garden Crusade. Denouncing the ostensible theological compromise, fundamentalist Baptist John R. Rice permanently withdrew his support from Graham, an episode considered the final break between self-identifying “Fundamentalists” and

¹⁰⁹ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Rev. ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004).

¹¹⁰ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 172-79.

“Evangelicals.”¹¹¹ Bright and Halverson, members of the mainline PC-USA denomination, further exemplified this irenic, evangelical ethos in the thematic and scriptural content of their gospels of God’s plan. Their use of Ephesians 1, and a unique translation thereof, provides a pertinent example.

In the Fellowship of the Burning Heart’s early days, Ephesians 1 accompanied Romans 12 as a foundational theme passage. The brochure announcing the 1949 College Briefing Conference said that amid rising secularism and uncertainty, humanity had “only ONE WAY” to “emerge from the captivity of our present meaningless state,” as taught in Ephesians 1: “God has allowed us to know the secret of HIS PLAN, and it is this: He purposes in His sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in CHRIST, that everything that exists in heaven and in earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him. (Ephesians 1:9-11 PHILLIPS).” The notice continued, “Those of us who have found Jesus Christ to be the Way the Truth and the LIFE must now realize that we have less time than when we first believed. What must be done must be done quickly.” “PHILLIPS” referred to English Bible scholar J.B. Phillips’ modernized translation of the epistles, first published in 1947 as *Letters to Young Churches*. As rector of St. John’s parish in Redhill, England, Phillips had begun the contemporary translation during wartime to help his young parishioners connect with a seemingly archaic text.¹¹²

Contrasted with the King James Version, the unique syntax of Phillips’ translation of Eph. 1, especially verse 10, made the passage ideally suited to the gospel of God’s plan. The KJV text read, “...in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” In this translation, God was the subject of the clause, the actor who would one day unite all of

¹¹¹ See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 233-35.

¹¹² J.B. Phillips recounted the origins of his translation in Phillips, *The Price of Success: An Autobiography* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Books, 1984), 94-110.

creation in Christ. Conversely, Phillips reversed the clause's subject and object—"that everything that exists in heaven or in earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him"—rendering creation itself as the subject destined for fulfillment. The revision shifted the emphasis from the work of God to man's destiny. As a whole, Ephesians 1 stressed God's sovereignty, with verses 3-8 addressing the predestination of believers to eternal salvation. It is instructive, therefore, that the Fellowship focused only on the verses speaking of predestination's silver lining, the Christian hope for the future. Over the following decade, the Fellowship applied the passage in an increasingly anthropocentric and temporal mode, focusing not on Christ's future action but on the present-day implications for his followers. In CCC's first year, for example, Bright used the Phillips version to justify his organizational goals. He wrote to Graham in June 1952, requesting a list of potential donors to whom Bright could mail the soon-to-be released *Communique*. With the Phillips version of Ephesians 1:9-10 printed at the bottom of the page, he closed, "We praise God for the blessed privilege of making the secret of his plan available to college men and women of America."¹¹³

That members of Hollywood Presbyterian used Phillips was not coincidental. The College Department adored *Letters to Young Churches*, with the Department's leadership team reading from it in their early Saturday-morning meetings with Mears.¹¹⁴ Starting in 1952, the English clergyman personally trained the HPC-sponsored Berlin Fellowship, a group of missionaries and former College Department members hoping to reach disillusioned European youth while serving in the World Council of Churches' work camps. Jack Hamburger, HPC's liaison to the Berlin Fellowship, exchanged frequent letters with Phillips which mentioned the popularity of his books among the Hollywood congregation. After the impressive sales of *Letters to Young Churches*, Phillips—like his more famous

¹¹³ Bright to Graham, June 27, 1952, Box 68, Folder 12, BGEA: Grady Baxter Wilson Papers, BGCA.

¹¹⁴ Dale Bruner, interview with author, March 3, 2017, Pasadena, California.

friend, C.S. Lewis—gained public renown in Britain, modelling for American (or, at least, Hollywood) pastors a way of communicating the Bible to contemporary society. Phillips’ 1953 book, *Making Men Whole*, and a series of messages broadcast via British and Australian radio the same year (published in 1954 as *Plain Christianity*), emphasized biblical faith’s relevance to modern times and psychology. In spring 1954, Phillips accepted the invitation to preach at HPC and that summer’s College Briefing Conference, discussing his topics with Mears during her trip to England for Graham’s London Crusade. (C.S. Lewis politely declined a CBC invitation, supposedly due to his fear of flying.) For the Briefing Conference Phillips addressed Christian psychology, love, and conversion.¹¹⁵ Broadcast live on television, his HPC sermons reflected his progressiveness, particularly in his critique of Paul’s curmudgeonly tone and “strange views on women.”¹¹⁶ Phillips had advised his Hollywood correspondents not to schedule him at churches of a “fundamental” variety—and, clearly, HPC was not such a church.¹¹⁷

In one particularly fawning letter to Phillips, Hamburger requested signed copies of *Letters to Young Churches*, noting, “Halverson preaches often from your book.” Halverson’s debt to the Phillips translation of Ephesians was seen in a speech he delivered in 1956 and 1957 to four influential audiences: the ICL Presidential Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., the Master’s Men in Los Angeles, Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, and, finally, the College Briefing Conference at Forest Home. The most high-profile engagement was the Presidential Prayer Breakfast gathering in February 1956. Halverson quoted the Phillips version of Ephesians 1:9-10 to introduce “The Christian Hope,” the second evening’s

¹¹⁵ Barbara Hudson Powers, *The Henrietta Mears Story* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 21. Phillips, Vereide, and Halverson spoke at an ICL conference held the week before at Forest Home. See ICL newsletter, September 1954, BGCA.

¹¹⁶ Phillips, taped sermon to Hollywood Presbyterian Church, n.d. [August 1954], Robert H. Mitchell Papers, Fuller Seminary Archives.

¹¹⁷ J.B. Phillips to Ralph Hamburger, June 27, 1954, Berlin Fellowship Records, Fuller Seminary Archives.

keynote address. “The Biblical idea is that God—standing outside and beyond history—has an eternal purpose running through history,” he said. “The God of the Beyond is at work here and now, using human means to accomplish His eternal purpose. God’s plan is contemporary. God’s plan is relevant.”¹¹⁸

Sociologist Will Herberg’s seminal 1955 treatise on American religious identity--*Protestant, Catholic, Jew*--inspired much of the address.¹¹⁹ Halverson shared Herberg’s pessimistic analysis: Despite Americans’ Judeo-Christian civic faith, their true credo remained prosperity, comfort, and security. Instead of encouraging religious revival only to protect these pursuits, Halverson contended, “The most desperate need in the world today no matter what the future holds is men and women totally committed unconditionally to the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour [sic] Jesus Christ.” Then, citing the Phillips version of Ephesians 1:9-10, he applied it as follows: “God uses means to accomplish His purposes; human means. He doesn’t have to—but He does. It’s this kind of a world. In the Divine economy, God has seen fit to gear His program to the availability of His People! God give us Kingdom of God men and women; through and through--out and out dedicated to the Divine purpose!”¹²⁰

But what was God’s divine purpose for his people to accomplish? Was it a specific evangelistic, political, or devotional program? Halverson did not clarify, instead closing with a vague admonition. “If we don’t stand for something, we’ll fall for anything,” he said, adding, “life’s consummate tragedy [is] intelligent men committed to nothing.” Usually, his applications were more individualistic. “The Divine Initiative,” a chapter in *Christian Maturity*, used the Ephesians passage to argue that Christian growth was “not the struggle to

¹¹⁸ Halverson, “The Christian Hope,” outline of address to National Prayer Breakfast, February 4, 1956, Halverson Collection, Princeton Seminary Archives.

¹¹⁹ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

¹²⁰ Halverson, the “Christian Hope.”

become the kind of person who we think God wants us to be” but “the surrender of our bodies, all our faculties, our right to ourselves, to God—that He may make us and mold us into the image of His Son, that through us His life and love and grace might flow.”¹²¹ God’s ultimate objective for the surrendered Christian was to make him more Christ-like—or, in standard Protestant language, to sanctify him. Rather than vague spiritual transformation, Halverson envisioned sanctification in “worldly” terms. This was clear from the devotional discussion outline he contributed to the December 1956 ICL newsletter. Depicting the Christmas story as “God’s way out” for fallen humanity, he cited Eph. 1:9-11 to personalize “God’s plan” for history:

Point of the discussion this month is that God’s purposes are bound up in and worked out through His Son Jesus Christ. Every man (each one of us) becomes his highest and noblest self in obedience to this plan of God, therefore the personal destiny of every man is involved in his relationship to Jesus Christ. A man’s relationship to Christ is absolutely paramount if that man intends to make the most of life.¹²²

Subsequent devotional books and sermons reiterated this application. His 1961 devotional, *Man to Man*, used the text as the theme passage for the entry, “Your Life, a Plan of God,” which said, “The man who is led by God realizes the maximum utilization of his potential. *As a man fulfills God’s will, he fulfills himself!*”¹²³ He used it again in a similarly titled 1963 sermon to Fourth Presbyterian Church, whose influential, suburban-D.C. congregation he pastored starting in 1958, while remaining active in ICL.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Idem, *Christian Maturity*, 62-63.

¹²² Idem, Discussion Outline, ICL Newsletter, December 1956, BGCA.

¹²³ Idem, *Man to Man: Meditations for Men* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 36.

¹²⁴ Halverson, “Every Man’s Life, A Plan of God,” sermon to Fourth Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD, April 1963, Richard C. Halverson Collection, Princeton Seminary Archives, Princeton, NJ. Although Halverson’s outline does not reference Bushnell’s sermon of the same title, the influence was almost certainly there. It is worth noting that Andrew Blackwood, who taught Halverson homiletics at Princeton Seminary and chaired the Practical Theology department from 1930 to 1950, included Bushnell’s famous sermon in a 1947 anthology. See Blackwood, *The Protestant Pulpit, an Anthology of Master Sermons from the Reformation to Our Own Day* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947).

Graham, too, referenced Eph. 1.9 as the basis of his 1956 sermon on “God’s will.”¹²⁵ However, as with all scripture references in the message, he cited the more commonly used King James Version. Nevertheless, his application followed the Fellowship’s, as Graham somewhat conceded by saying, “I want to lift this text out of context and speak to you on the mystery of the will of God.” The 1958 publication of the Phillips New Testament in Modern English seems to have stoked further enthusiasm for the translator. Bright included Phillips’s 1961 release, *Your God is Too Small*, alongside the Van Dusen Letter (“now in seven languages”) in a “Suggested Summer Reading” list printed in the May/June 1962 issue of *Collegiate Challenge*. Debuting the new promotional magazine in 1961 with a print run of 150,000, CCC mailed *Collegiate Challenge* to individual supporters, campus chapters, and fraternity and sorority houses at hundreds of universities. The magazine featured timely articles on philosophical and scientific issues concerning students; nevertheless, the gospel of God’s plan remained preeminent. A page of the May/June 1962 issue, entitled “Facing the Future with Confidence,” thanked sponsors for their vision “to perpetuate the Christian heritage through tomorrow’s leaders,” continuing:

The words of a popular song, ‘I know not what the future holds,’ describe the anxiety and frustration of today’s collegian. These sponsors desire that each of these same collegians should be able to say, ‘But I know *Who* holds the future!’ Their hope is that America’s young men and women will be introduced to the God Whose Word presents the foundational concepts of true freedom and the worth of the individual before his Creator, the Lord of all.¹²⁶

The Phillips excerpt from Eph. 1 concluded the message. However, Bright tacked on verse twelve, “And here is the staggering thing—that in all which will one day belong to him we have been promised a share.” Thus, as in 1952, Bright employed the text to promote his ministry. In this instance, however, he reminded sponsors of the promised returns on their

¹²⁵ Graham, “The Mystery of God’s Will,” 1.

¹²⁶ *Collegiate Challenge*, May/June 1962.

investment, exemplified by the adjoining image of three clean-cut, *white* college students confidently looking upwards with gleeful smiles.

II. Discerning God's Plan for the Surrendered Christian

Thus, from the late 1950s, the gospel of God's plan became a standard message disseminated to millions by Mears's proteges and, particularly in their use of J.B. Phillips' translation, increasingly bore the marks of a "new evangelical" ethos. Once converted to this individualistic, providential gospel, a question inevitably followed: How may believers discern the specifics of God's plan for their lives? By the late 1950s, CCC had developed instructional materials helping new Christians understand foundational matters of doctrine and devotion. A record series released in 1960, "What Christians Believe," featured 20 lectures by Graham and Halverson, along with J. Edwin Orr, Fuller Seminary's Wilbur Smith, and other neo-evangelical luminaries. Halverson contributed a condensed, 20-minute version of his "Christian Maturity" treatise, including the book's climactic teaching on becoming oneself through adherence to God's plan.¹²⁷ Bright's introductory talk, "The Uniqueness of Jesus," reiterated the opening of the "God's plan for your life" script but stressed how God, the "great architect of life," guided believers, as stated in Psalm 37:23, and worked all things "together for good," as promised in Romans 8:28.¹²⁸

Dallas Seminary graduate Ted Martin, who joined CCC staff in 1960, helped Bright codify CCC's official theological teaching in *Ten Basic Steps to Christian Maturity* (1958-1964) and an accompanying Teacher's Manual (1965). Bright introduced the material as "Follow-up Evangelism" intended to provide not a "complete development" of the faith, but a "sufficient understanding of how you may know and appropriate God's plan for your life." Once "fully appropriated," he maintained, "the spiritual truths contained in this study will

¹²⁷ Halverson, "Christian Maturity," in *What Christians Believe* (1960), Campus Crusade for Christ Ephemera, BGCA.

¹²⁸ Bright, "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," *What Christians Believe* (1960), CCC Ephemera, BGCA.

assure you of the full and abundant life which Jesus promised us in John 10.10.” More spiritual program than systematic theology, the Steps promised *results*: personal growth for new Christians—and organizational growth for CCC. The series contained mostly original material, beginning with the person of Jesus and continuing with the Christian “adventure,” a Holy Spirit “how-to” guide, prayer, Bible study, obedience, witnessing, stewardship, and, finally, the Old and New Testaments. Sprinkled throughout the lessons were quotations from a host of renowned contemporary and past leaders, including Mears, Halverson, the Reformers, and numerous proponents of the Victorious Life movement such as Andrew Murray and Charles G. Trumbull.¹²⁹ With the lecture series and manuals, Bright joined Halverson and Graham in unpacking the specific implications of God’s “wonderful” plan for the individual. Reflecting their unique ministry goals, the leaders’ specific teaching on vocation and discernment sometimes conflicted, but there were common themes. The teaching on vocation stressed evangelism but not necessarily foreign missions; it also assumed male dominance. The teaching on discerning one’s vocation, meanwhile, struck a tenuous balance between objectivity and subjectivity.

Regarding the first theme, foreign missions, it is helpful to return to the 1947 Forest Home Awakening and subsequent College Briefing Conference, when the Fellowship of the Burning Heart’s founders (including Halverson and Bright) organized a regiment of university students into God’s service. To strengthen the church against totalitarian threats, Mears sought to train the next generation of male Christian leaders, meaning pastors, missionaries, and other evangelists. Halverson shared her vision of leadership until his dentist-chair epiphany, when he shifted his focus from church workers to lay professionals, who, he insisted, could fulfill God’s call to evangelism within “secular” vocations. As he wrote in *Perspective*, the businessman “who invests his money in God’s kingdom is

¹²⁹ Bright, ed., *Teachers Manual for the Ten Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1965), 152, 202-203, 207.

investing his life as surely as the preacher—the evangelist—the missionary.”¹³⁰ *Man to Man* stated, “The whole mission of the Church is evangelism, the winning of the lost to Christ, and evangelism begins right where the Church is, right where the Christian is.” Thus, while every Christian should contribute to world evangelization, not every person was called to the pulpit or to foreign fields—undoubtedly a relief to his core audience of established men with families and corporate responsibilities. He agreed with Mears that the missionary call arose not from the greater numerical “need” for overseas workers, but chiefly from Christ’s mandate to go into the world. Thus, “as each person does his job right where he is and prays that laborers are sent wherever God directs, each Christian’s mission field will be the world and each will be following His call day in day out right where the Lord has placed Him.”¹³¹

Bright’s foreign-missions strategy was to export the full CCC franchise, including its standardized literature, to university campuses. CCC’s international expansion—into 40 countries by 1960—created openings for American staff workers to train national CCC directors.¹³² Bright persistently recruited for his own organization. “Campus Crusade Needs You,” printed in the February 1953 *Communique*, alluded to Mears’s 1947 call to service “for such a time as this.” Quoting Esther 4:14, the note said, “God has a plan and purpose for you. He can not accomplish His work unless you do your share. Does His plan for you include sharing in the work of Campus Crusade?”¹³³ Bright’s promotion of CCC pervaded his guide on discerning God’s plan, published in 1963. The “Paul Brown Letter,” as it became known, taught a (fictional) UCLA fraternity brother and recent CCC convert how to obtain the wonderful, “abundant” life by determining God’s plan for his work. In considering various callings, Bright advised the student to assess his talents and to make a pro-con chart

¹³⁰ Halverson, “Money—blessing or curse?” *Perspective*, 31.

¹³¹ Idem, *Man to Man*, 130.

¹³² Turner, 97.

¹³³ *Communique*, February 1953.

for four main vocational paths, listing “Campus Crusade for Christ” as the first choice, followed by “teaching,” “church ministry,” and, finally, “business or profession.”¹³⁴ Reiterating CCC’s staffing needs several times thereafter, the Paul Brown Letter was used as an organizational recruiting tool as much as a general spiritual guide and was included in the staff application. Bright’s chief criterion for determining vocation was evangelistic: “How can I use my yielded life to save the most souls for Christ?”¹³⁵ Omitting explicit recommendation of the foreign missionary vocation, and dismissing the evangelistic opportunities available to Christians in secular professions, he promoted domestic parachurch work for both men and women.

In keeping with his style, Graham’s stress on missions depended upon his audience. In his final talk to the 1949 College Briefing Conference, he echoed Mears by exhorting students to pray, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The call to arms, bolstered by his renewed confidence in the Bible, prompted hundreds of dedications to full-time service.¹³⁶ Although his 1956 sermon on God’s will did not evaluate specific vocations, he pointed to his wife Ruth’s “changing circumstances”—meeting him, that is—that kept her from returning to the China mission field, where she grew up. “Now she is a missionary to her little flock,” he said.¹³⁷ Graham’s reference to Ruth captured one of the most striking features of the gospel of God’s plan—its stress on traditional gender roles.

As discussed in chapter three, Mears sought to cultivate the next generation of male Christian leaders to replace those lost to war, an objective her “boys” readily pursued. Halverson self-consciously focused on building up male laity Monday through Friday, partly owing to his realization that only a fraction of HPC’s men were needed to serve on any given

¹³⁴ Bright, *The Paul Brown Letter* (CCC, 1963), 2, CRUA.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Powers, *Henrietta Mears Story*, 301-305.

¹³⁷ Graham, “Mystery of God’s Will.”

Sunday. His “specialist” ministry certainly reflected the patriarchal trends of the 1950s, when veterans returned to their traditional, public roles as breadwinners and many women discharged from wartime duties retreated to the private, domestic sphere.¹³⁸ Mostly neglecting God’s will for women—whether housewives or office workers—he did encourage men to be attentive husbands and fathers and to avoid the “temptation of a bad woman.”¹³⁹ Overall, his teaching on vocation presumed male dominance.

As evidenced in Turner’s history, male domination pervaded CCC during the 1950s and early 1960s. Bright heavily pursued and promoted male converts and staffers, believing they would attract more men overall to the organization.¹⁴⁰ The fact that two major pieces of CCC literature, the Van Dusen and Paul Brown letters, were addressed to men was telling enough. Clearly prioritizing the career decisions of men, Bright waited until page five of the six-page Paul Brown letter to answer “the questions asked by your girl friend.” According to Bright, the same discernment principles would “apply in the case of a secretary, homemaker, an invalid, or one who, because of circumstances beyond her control, does not have direct contact with men and women who are in need of Christ.”¹⁴¹ Such a statement implied, firstly, that the only legitimate female vocations were those supporting male leadership in an office or in the home—ruling out even independent foreign missionary service. Secondly, most women were afforded only minimal opportunities for public influence. Issuing yet another plug for CCC, he noted how crucial female secretaries were to the operation of Christian organizations, including the “world-wide ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ” and his “own personal ministry.” On the other hand, he maintained that a secretary working for a “secular organization” would have fewer opportunities to make her life count for Christ. For

¹³⁸ See Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875-present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 97-117.

¹³⁹ Halverson, *Perspective*, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Turner, 85-100.

¹⁴¹ Paul Brown Letter, 5.

Bright, Halverson, and Graham, the vocations most compatible with God's will were those offering men opportunities for evangelistic *influence* and women opportunities for serving such men.

Regarding the specific steps to discover God's plan, it is helpful to analyze them in the light of Mears's epiphany about discerning God's will. As discussed in Chapter Three, in 1952 Mears combined Romans 12:1 with Phil. 2:13 to conclude that God automatically established the thoughts and therefore the path of the yielded, "mature" Christian. This obviated the need to cast fleeces or wait for external signs indicating God's will for one's life. Nevertheless, in her Sunday School curriculum for Christian adolescents—who were not yet "mature"—she set general parameters for discerning God's guidance concerning college and career.¹⁴² Between 1951 and 1959, she reversed the order of the steps, placing the internal, "still, small voice" ahead of Scripture. Although each of her protégé s promulgated a unique discernment formula, they generally followed Mears's teaching that a devout, disciplined believer should expect to be guided internally, without having to search for external signs. Confident that God's will for the individual was not, in fact, mysterious, each leader's system still allowed for subjective interpretation.

At the 1949 College Briefing Conference, still beleaguered by a crisis of faith, Graham taught the straightforward, three-step discernment process one of his mentors, former Youth for Christ president Bob Cook, had recommended in 1945: Word, Prayer, Circumstances.¹⁴³ In the *Hour of Decision* sermon on God's will, Graham identified five aids: scripture, the Holy Spirit, conscience, circumstances, and answered prayer.

If regularly reading the Word, the Christian could rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance, a precedent Graham said had been set by the apostolic church before it possessed written scriptures. "If you would know the will of God, it can be revealed through His Spirit. It is He

¹⁴² See ch. 3, 123, 131.

¹⁴³ See ch. 2, 55.

who has come to reveal unto us all truth.” Believers’ “transformed” conscience, “awakened and enlightened by the Spirit of God,” would automatically steer them away from “self-pleasing” actions toward things “pleasing to God.” Because answered prayers illuminated God’s will, it was vital for believers to “steal away with God” in a “quiet place” every day.¹⁴⁴ Revealing the popularity of PLP, he repeated this sermon on the *Hour of Decision* twice—in 1959, almost verbatim, and again in 1962, when he adapted it to students at elite Massachusetts women’s college Mt. Holyoake, his audience for that week’s broadcast.¹⁴⁵

Graham also discussed discernment in “My Answer,” his nationally syndicated advice column. After its 1950 debut, readers submitted practical questions about the Christian life, and Graham wrote (or explicitly approved text drafted by a BGEA staffer) brief, 200-or-so word responses to selected letters. In 1955, over 200 newspapers carried the column, reaching 27 million people; in 1960, the column still reached 16 million readers through 150 newspapers.¹⁴⁶ That year Doubleday, a mass-market publisher, released a compilation of “My Answer” selections. The responses indicated that Graham, at least through the 1950s, presumed each inquirer to be a Christian, barring any evidence to the contrary, which he would then use as an opportunity to evangelize. The section “How Should I Serve?” featured several entries about discerning God’s will for a career or missionary calling. To a young Army man contemplating life after finishing his service, Graham replied, “I am convinced that anyone who honestly wants to know God’s will for his life will be led to a clear understanding of God’s plan for him. This has its foundation in a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.” After knowing Christ, there were “certain factors which converge in giving us spiritual leading.” He said, “First there is the inward impulse

¹⁴⁴ Paul Brown Letter, 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ Graham, “God’s Will,” *Hour of Decision*, November 1, 1959, tape 512g, CN 191, BGCA; Ibid, “Finding God’s Will for Your Life,” *Hour of Decision*, December 2, 1962, tape 673g, CN 191, BGCA.

¹⁴⁶ The Introduction to *My Answer* gives the 16 million figure. See also Donald Miller, “Popular Religion in the 1950s: Graham and Peale,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 1975.

coming from the leading of the Holy Spirit. Then there is the Bible which corroborates our sense of Divine guidance. Finally, God often uses a trend of circumstances through which He indicates His leading.” Pointing to the “definite promise” in Proverbs 3. 5-6, he concluded, “Believe it and act on it. God will not fail you.”¹⁴⁷ The answer mirrored Mears’s teaching in “God’s Plan for My Life,” by placing the Holy Spirit’s guidance ahead of Bible study, which merely *corroborated* inward leading.

Halverson: Trust God and Get Out of His Way!

Halverson’s move to D.C. to co-direct ICL bears significance for his teaching on discerning God’s plan. Vereide hailed from a pietistic, Methodist background but had been personally influenced by Oxford Group founder Frank Buchman after their 1934 meeting.¹⁴⁸ From ICL’s start Vereide promoted an Oxford Group-style program of Quiet Time and “Guidance,” in which groups and individuals prayed silently, awaiting His impressions and directions.¹⁴⁹ This emphasis strategically served ICL’s vision of uniting publicly influential men despite varied denominational backgrounds. United in their individual quests for personalized, situational guidance, ICL’s leaders and members circumvented doctrinal and even political divisiveness. The opening entry of Halverson’s 1957 *Perspective* volume explained the book title as referring to the real-world benefits of seeking divine wisdom, Monday through Friday. Another entry recommending the “Quiet Time” bore the title, “Strategy for Efficiency.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, although Halverson does not appear to have been influenced by Buchmanism, his teaching complemented Vereide’s in stressing the Quiet Time as the venue for ascertaining God’s will.

¹⁴⁷ Billy Graham, *My Answer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 167.

¹⁴⁸ Philip Boobyer, *The Spiritual Vision of Frank Buchman* (University Park, PA: 2013), 43.

¹⁴⁹ Norman Grubb, *Modern Viking*, 51. See also Sharlet, *The Family*, 127-29. This is the most comprehensive account of ICL but it should be noted that Sharlet, a former *Rolling Stone* reporter, sensationalizes ICL’s right-wing political activism.

¹⁵⁰ Halverson, “Strategy for Efficiency,” *Perspective*, 104.

To the question of discernment, Halverson's primary response was Romans 12. In *Christian Maturity*, he wrote:

How can I discover God's will for my life?" some ask, as though it were a deep mystery that very few were ever able to discover. God has been so explicit in this regard that it is difficult to understand how any could miss it. This is His will in black and white, recorded for all to see and hear: 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice...be not conformed to his world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind...' Out of this commitment flows the inevitable, '...that you may know what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.'¹⁵¹

Without explaining the practical implications, Halverson said that this passage taught the "one dependable strategy whereby a man may discover himself, become himself, fulfill himself." *Man to Man* was divided into thematic chapters, including one on God's will entitled "The man who knows where he is going." The entry, "How God Leads," provided a few practical signposts of guidance, as follows:

God may engineer circumstances so that there is no alternative way to go. He may 'speak' through a passage of Scripture or the word of a friend or sermon. But the final test is inward—what might be called intuition. This may be thought of as the 'still small voice' within. Assuming a man's opening to the will of God, his intuition can be trusted.¹⁵²

The Holy Spirit, by renewing the mind from the inside, "established the thoughts" of the Christian—but such thoughts, he insisted, never contradicted scriptural mandates. Still, Halverson's signposts were subjective, evincing his remarkable confidence in the individual's ability to interpret events, to identify God "speaking" through isolated Bible verses or human advice, and to trust one's personal "intuition" as an accurate receptor of divine direction. As he insisted in the entry, "Inerrant Guidance," a few pages prior, "Man does not have the responsibility to figure out God's will, that is God's part." Whether through the above tests or some other sign, "However He does it, God will make known His

¹⁵¹ Idem, *Christian Maturity*, 138.

¹⁵² Halverson, "How God Leads," *Man to Man*, 40.

way to the man who waits to walk in it.”¹⁵³ Man’s job was simply to “get out of God’s way”!

In contrast to Mears, Halverson primarily addressed established professionals, perhaps explaining why he rejected the notion that God’s will was a “cut and dried thing like a blueprint—or like a mold that had been cast.” Instead, God’s unfolding “Providence” was “dynamic,” “immediate,” “step-by-step,” like the “potter shaping a clay in his hands.” Like Mears, he exuded confidence that God would lead the mature Christian automatically: “Any man who *wants God’s best*—WHO SEEKS GOD’S WILL—*can count on Divine direction. Nothing delights God more than to lead men in His way.*” As *Perspective* had promised, any man who surrendered himself daily, or “as often as necessary,” would be led by God. “*He guarantees it!*”¹⁵⁴

Halverson’s unique spin on the “pilot” metaphor (another Mears favorite) further illuminated what he meant by “inerrant guidance.” In the *Perspective* entry, “Technological Faith,” he compared God’s leading to General Electric’s “Co-Pilot,” the company’s latest innovation for the U.S. military during the Cold War. The instrument detected impending attacks by enemies not yet visible, alerted the pilot, and then automatically navigated the plane. (The March 22, 1954 issue of *Life* magazine had featured a two-page G.E. advertisement for the technology.¹⁵⁵) Like the pilot trusting the mechanical co-pilot to stay on course, the Christian could be confident that his Divine Co-Pilot was “leading and directing the affairs of his life,” not due to “some sort of an emotional experience...but because *he knows that God can be trusted.*” By attempting to “take over and *fly his way,*” a Christian would “journey off course.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Idem, “Inerrant Guidance,” *Man to Man*, 37.

¹⁵⁴ Idem, “God will lead you,” *Perspective*, 74.

¹⁵⁵ “G.E. Co-Pilot,” *Life*, March 22, 1954, 87.

Halverson's anxiety-quelling trust in God's providence perhaps explained why he often presented his teaching in such a light, inspirational style, replete with italics, block capitals, and ellipses for dramatic effect. Save for *Christian Maturity*, his newsletter and devotional books provided influential men with brief, positive thoughts for their workday—and Cowman advertised them accordingly. The announcement of *Man to Man*'s 1961 release read as follows: "This direct, straight-from-the-shoulder book for MEN ONLY is now available. Here is action-packed spiritual truth articulated clearly with a special kind of masculine pungency." It described Halverson as "no stranger to Christian and non-Christian readers," an expert on presenting "clearly a plain, simple formula for successful living." His 1963 release, *The Quiet Men*, purportedly demonstrated his "successful formula lived out in the lives of 22 men," according to Cowman's 1964 promotional catalog. The evangelical politician Mark O. Hatfield, a Wheaton College alumnus and Governor of Oregon (1959-67) contributed the first success story. Another blurb described *Perspective*'s "meditations for MEN" as follows: "Short, 3 minute, one page chapters. A blue-print of life in depth. All men—of any vocation—will find needed inspiration and counsel...a valuable desk book for home or office."¹⁵⁷

Bright and the Paul Brown Letter

Halverson's colleague Bill Bright, following the Van Dusen Letter's format, individually packaged a technique for discernment that was more clear-cut than Halverson's inspirational reflections. In the Paul Brown Letter, Bright recounted the advice he supposedly gave to a "choice young college graduate" who sought "counsel concerning God's will for his life." Explaining what he judged the "safest approach" to the problem, Bright recommended what he had "chosen to call the Sound Mind Principle of Scripture,"

¹⁵⁶ Halverson, *Perspective*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ Cowman Publishers Catalog, 1964, box 509, folder 11, Fellowship Foundation Records, BGCA.

which he abbreviated as “SMP.” Then came his attention-grabbing sales pitch: “In less than an hour, by following the suggestions contained in this letter, this young man discovered what he had been seeking for years. He knew not only the work which God wanted him to do, but the very organization with which he was to be affiliated.”¹⁵⁸

The Sound Mind Principle derived from 2 Timothy 1.7’s teaching that God gave the believer a spirit of power, love, and a “sound mind,” which Bright equated to a “well-balanced mind” that was controlled and “remade” by the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 12.1-2. The Sound Mind Principle had certain prerequisites. The believer must be clear of any “unconfessed sin;” be fully “dedicated” to Christ and “filled and controlled by the Spirit through faith;” and, finally, be walking in the Spirit “moment by moment,” trusting that the Lord directed the steps of the righteous.¹⁵⁹ Once those conditions were met, Bright advised Brown to seek the counsel of “mature, dedicated Christians,” since God “often speaks to us through other Christians.” However, other Christians’ advice should not be used as a “crutch” replacing total reliance on the Lord’s leading, as taught in the classic verses on guidance in Psalm 37 and Proverbs 3. Insisting that God’s will for the individual never contradicted biblical commands, he invoked one of Mears’s breakthrough verses, Phil 2.13.

The Sound Mind Principle taught that a Christian could determine God’s will by employing “Spirit-controlled reason,” which entailed four checks: “1. The Authority of Scripture; 2. Providential Circumstances; 3. Conviction based upon reason; 4. Impressions of the Holy Spirit upon our minds.” Bright’s teaching on providential circumstances challenged prevailing evangelical wisdom, specifically, the idea that God guided by opening or closing doors to various opportunities. This practice, he said, led many Christians to base God’s will on elements of “chance” and the “process of elimination” rather than on “seeking God’s best.” Trials such as “financial needs, loss of health, objection of loved ones and criticism of

¹⁵⁸ Bright, Paul Brown Letter (1963), 1, CRUA.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Brown Letter, 2.

fellow Christians” did *not* prove that God had closed a door. Instead, God might be testing the believer’s faith and obedience, resulting in “richest blessing.”

Appraising impressions, he clarified, was “safer” with a “mature” Christian than with a “new or carnal” Christian, since the “inexperienced” believer might misinterpret them. A legacy of Victorious Life teaching, this threefold categorization of humanity—“natural man,” “carnal Christians” and “spiritual Christians”—shaped CCC’s entire program of results-oriented spiritual techniques.¹⁶⁰ If one struggled to ascertain God’s guidance, then the believer should administer Bright’s remedy until the problem resolved: Confess any unconfessed sin, re-surrender one’s will, and pray again for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Usually, he said, the confirmation that one was doing “what God wants” consisted in a “quiet, peaceful assurance”; however, confirmation could come in “various ways,” based on many factors, including an individual’s “personality.” Bright explained:

Living according to the Sound Mind Principle allows for dramatic leadings of God. But, we are not to wait for such revelations before we start moving for Christ. Faith must have an object. A Christian’s faith is built upon the authority of God’s Word supported by historical fact, and not upon any shallow emotional experience. However, a Christian’s trust in God’s will revealed in His Word will result in the decisions which are made by following the SMP.¹⁶¹

Any sincere Christian who regularly studied the Bible and allowed a “loving, all-wise sovereign God and Father to control his life” would “inevitably” experience the proper “result” of following the Sound Mind Principle—“the most joyful, abundant, and fruitful life of all.” God would “draw men to Himself” through the individual.¹⁶²

The 1964 edition of *Ten Basic Steps* included the Paul Brown letter at the end of step eight, “The Christian and Stewardship,” predicating the choice of one’s career upon total dedication—of one’s body, possessions, talents, time, and money. Step six, “The Christian

¹⁶⁰ Turner, 88-89.

¹⁶¹ Paul Brown Letter, 6.

¹⁶² Ibid.

and Obedience,” also addressed discerning God’s specific plan for the individual. Quoting Scottish revivalist Henry Drummond’s teaching, based on John 7:17, that the “instrument” to knowing God’s will was “obedience,” the Teacher’s Manual commented, “Perfect obedience would be perfect happiness if we had perfect confidence in the power we are obeying.”¹⁶³ Not all of the teaching was so black and white, however. A list of “practical hints” clarified that obedience was neither “ascetic” sacrifice of “all fun and personal possessions” nor “outward conformity to a list of external rules of do’s and don’ts.” Nor was it “telling God what we can or will do for Him,” illustrated as follows:

Many Christians spend a lifetime refusing to surrender to the will of God for fear He will send them to Africa—only to find that when they do finally surrender willingly, God never intended them to be in Africa; and as a result of an unwilling heart, they have missed His best for their lives right here at home. Remember, though, it is His will for some to go to Africa.¹⁶⁴

Obedience, rather, was “that attitude of heart which willingly conforms to the instruction of the spirit of God as set forth in the word of God,” entailing the “practical application of what is learned to one’s every day Christian experience.” Ultimately, obedience was “only initiated and continued by the fullness of the Holy Spirit who alone can live a Christ-honored life through the believer.”¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Sociologist Richard Quebedeaux deemed Bright, “Pragmatic Theologian of the Holy Spirit,” a fitting title for someone who claimed God’s exact plan for one’s life could be discerned through a set of spiritual techniques—perhaps in less than one hour.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Bright, Halverson, and Graham all rejected the essential “mystery” of God’s will. However,

¹⁶³ Bright, ed., *Teachers Manual for the Ten Basic Steps*, 318.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 313-14.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Quebedeaux, *I found it! Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1979), 79-108.

their instructions for discerning it acknowledged some degree of subjectivity. After consulting the Bible for general principles, the final seat of authority lay *within—if one was a surrendered, spiritual, mature Christian, that is*. The problem, however, was that the gospel of God’s plan targeted those far below this higher spiritual plane. The introduction to the *Ten Basic Steps* Teachers Manual, for example, identified the main audience for the book as interested-but-not-converted students, followed by brand-new adherents to the faith. Nearly 500 pages in length, the thorough Teacher’s Manual provided Bible-based lessons and meticulously outlined steps for appropriating the power of the Holy Spirit and, thereby, the “wonderful” plan for one’s life.

During Bright’s ministry, he frequently asserted that God had led him to make certain decisions, including some risky ones.¹⁶⁷ In 1962, for example, he decided to purchase a palatial mountain resort for CCC’s new headquarters before securing his Board’s or donors’ support. Human opinion did not matter, of course, if one had received God’s approval. Recalling his prayer to obtain the property during a 1961 visit, Bright wrote, “though not in an audible voice, God spoke to me as clearly as if there had been a public address system in the room.... ‘I have been saving this property for Campus Crusade for Christ. I want you to have it, and I will supply the funds to pay for it,’ to which he replied: ‘I claim this property in your name.’”¹⁶⁸

The move to Arrowhead Springs hastened CCC’s evolution into a parachurch juggernaut that reached dozens of countries and new demographics, including military and prison chaplains, high-schoolers, and lay churchgoers.¹⁶⁹ In 1965, Bright cooperated with a Canadian marketing firm to produce CCC’s most famous tract, the title soon known to millions of Americans. *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* condensed the original

¹⁶⁷ Turner, 139.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 113. Bright, *Come Help Change the World*, 40.

¹⁶⁹ Bright, foreword to *Teacher’s Manual for the Ten Basic Steps*, ii.

God's-plan message into a pocket-sized format, with only a few sentences and one diagram explaining each Law. Staff workers, at home and abroad, carried it around with them to use in personal evangelism, and distributed it in bulk. But was it still relevant? Since the time Bright innovated his evangelistic sales pitch, the era of consensus and certainty in American life had begun to fade. To the emerging student generation, his gospel of God's plan may have seemed hopelessly outdated, reeking of mass consumerism, cheesy advertising, dogmatism, and patriarchal authority. Yet the quest for self-realization remained central to American culture. Halverson's work, especially, reflected evangelicals' growing acceptance of psychological, therapeutic language. Although he maintained, "Spiritual maturity is Christ-realization, not self-realization," he effectually conflated the two: A professional man did not need to sacrifice self-realization to attain Christ-realization; rather, the way to self-realization was *through* Christ-realization.¹⁷⁰ God wanted a man to actualize his full potential as a "divine original," a conviction dovetailing with mainstream aspirations.

While CCC and friends disseminated the gospel of God's plan, the Chicago-centered student ministries, YFC and IVCF, adapted their mission strategy to the 1960s revolutions at home and abroad. This will be the theme of the next chapter. Paralleling CCC's model, YFC narrowed its evangelistic focus to teenagers, specifically, instead of the world, generally. IVCF leaders maintained their Urbana-centered program for traditional foreign missions but revised the missionary call. In both cases, PLP and self-actualization continued to merge among evangelicals: in YFC, intentionally, via the gospel of God's plan, and in IVCF, unintentionally, as the loss of an objective call to missions created more room for subjective approaches to discerning God's will.

¹⁷⁰ Halverson, *Christian Maturity*, 79.

Chapter Five: PLP and American Evangelical Students in the Long 1960s: The Decline of Overseas Missionary Vocations

I have two gripping convictions about the next ten years in the world's history. First, the next ten years, 1960-70, are going to be the most important and most significant in all the world's history, with the exception of the Apostolic Days in the first century. I am calling these next ten years a 'Decade of Destiny' because I firmly believe that the destiny of the world itself is going to be determined during this time. My second conviction is that *teen-agers are going to play the most significant role in this 'Decade of Destiny.'*

With this prophecy, issued in December 1959, Youth for Christ President Ted Engstrom cast his vision for the 1960s.¹ The immediate context was to plug the first-ever Capital Teen Convention, which would welcome 12,000 high schoolers to Washington, D.C., between Christmas and New Year's Day 1960. The convention's themes, "You and your country, You and your world, You and your future," captured YFC's perception of its place within and duty to contemporary society. Promotion for the event exuded patriotism, highlighting endorsements from conservative politicians such as Senator Frank Carlson and Vice President Richard Nixon. The YFC of 1959—then celebrating its "Miracle Year," fifteen years after its wartime founding—would become almost unrecognizable by 1969, due to the very developments Engstrom predicted: a world-changing decade, led by youth movements. As Hugh McLeod maintains, "In the religious history of the West, these years may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation."²

From his southern California base, Bill Bright spent the decade expanding CCC into a global empire and spreading his gospel of God's plan—"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." YFC and IVCF, meanwhile, exhibited more change during the 1960s; like American evangelicals, overall, the student ministries did not merely react to

¹ Ted Engstrom, "You Can Be a Capital Teen," *YFC*, December 1959, 8-9.

² Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

cultural transformation but accommodated and even contributed to it.³ YFC took some cues from southern California. During CCC's nascence, Bright invited Engstrom to a staff conference, at which the latter shared his "vision and dream of reaching a generation of high school teenagers with the Gospel." Engstrom recalled in his memoir that as the two "prayed together, jointly strategized, and compared notes," the meeting became a "memorable and defining moment in discerning God's call" on his ministry.⁴ IVCF, meanwhile, retained its concern for traditional foreign missions but adapted it to meet the intellectual and cultural challenges of the day. To trace the shifts, this chapter follows an abbreviated "Long Sixties" periodization, beginning circa 1958 and concluding in 1971.⁵ Additionally, 1957-58 serves as a natural transitional point for the Chicago-based student organizations. In 1957 YFC's Robert A. Cook concluded a nine-year term as President, while IVCF's C. Stacey Woods began stepping back from national leadership. YFC's new president, Engstrom, spearheaded crucial developments until resigning in 1963, when Carl Bihl stepped in for two years before Sam Woglemuth's 1965-73 term. During a period of organizational crisis, IVCF was overseen by two leaders, Charles Hummel (National Secretary, 1956-60, and Director, 1960-61) and Charles Troutman (1961-65), before John Alexander began a sixteen-year term in 1965.⁶ As *TIME* magazine's January 1965 cover story claimed, that year's cohort of graduating high school seniors was the first to espouse socio-political views differing vastly

³ See, for example, Axel Schafer, ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Ibid, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicals from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴ Engstrom, *Reflections on a Pilgrimage: Six Decades of Ministry* (Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishing, 1999), 51.

⁵ Schafer, ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, follows the Long Sixties periodization, popularized by Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Marwick bookends the era with economic boom and bust. See also Clive D. Field, *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19-20.

⁶ For YFC, see James Hefly, *God Goes to High School* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970), 69, 63-85. For IVCF, see Hunt and Hunt, 230-31, and MacLeod, *C. Stacey Woods*, 163, 166.

from their parents’.⁷ Thus, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the new crop of YFC and IVCF leaders straddled a seismic generational shift, as the Baby Boomers (born 1946-64) came of age on the “eve of destruction.”⁸

Opportunity and Obligation

At the 1958 annual YFC convention, Ted Engstrom marked his first year as president by reflecting on the organization’s recent change in priorities. Three years prior, he recalled, a convention speaker cautioned YFC leaders against trying to do everything—to reach the whole world—but failing to do anything well. Instead, they needed to “specialize.” Bob Pierce, who issued the advice, had directed the Los Angeles-area YFC before founding war-relief ministry World Vision, International, in 1950, during a trip to Korea. During the 1950s Pierce also served as a field representative for International Christian Leadership, alongside Richard Halverson and Bill Bright, the latter appointing Pierce to CCC’s Board.⁹ Heeding Pierce’s suggestion, Engstrom said, YFC thereafter restructured its programs to focus on reaching teenagers themselves. Thus, as the “long sixties” began, YFC directed its ministry to the cultural context of white, middle-class American adolescents, their majority demographic. Due to the postwar economic boom, by the mid-fifties, the “middle class” had grown to encompass 60% of Americans; by 1960, the gross national product had risen 250% from its 1945 figure.¹⁰ The new “affluent society” meant that more—though certainly not all—young Americans could entertain “grand expectations” for the future.¹¹ Juvenile

⁷ *Time*, “Today’s Teenagers,” January 1965.

⁸ James Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

⁹ See David P. King, “The New Internationalists: World Vision and the Revival of American Evangelical Humanitarianism, 1950–2010,” *Religions*, 3 (2012): 922–49.

¹⁰ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 112.

delinquency rose alongside the economy, a development YFC tackled through its “Youth Guidance” program for troubled teenagers. Finally, the Soviets’ shocking October 1957 launch of the Sputnik satellite spurred a flurry of technological advance and university expansion. The August 1958 edition of “Global Countdown” reported Soviet teenagers’ alleged superiority in science education and issued the following judgment:

There is no question but that the price of survival for the free world will be a new emphasis on study...for every young person who hopes to survive these trying times. And, obviously, the lesson for every Christian to learn is that God would also make demands upon his mind....It will simply not be possible for the Gospel to make much of an impression in the fantastic world of science and intellect which tomorrow will bring, without young people who are able...to adequately defend the wonderful message of...Jesus Christ.¹²

YFC’s emphasis on higher education reflected the relatively elite demographic it targeted—upwardly mobile, college-bound teenagers. For comparison, in fall 1959, only 23% of Americans aged 18 to 24 were enrolled in a university.¹³

The emphasis on education occasioned recurring articles on how to determine God’s plan for one’s college. Among them, a retired high-school principal promised students that God would “disclose his will” through “inner approval” regarding college choice, so long as they kept praying. By obtaining “certainty of God’s approval,” they would ensure a “wonderful” college experience, full of “spiritual and intellectual growth.”¹⁴ Although each magazine issue contained dozens of advertisements for Christian liberal arts colleges and Bible institutes, high schoolers were not exhorted to stay inside the evangelical bubble. In October 1959, Woods, then directing the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students full-time, contended against fundamentalists who labeled attending a secular university a

¹¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-74* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹² Dave Breese, “Global Countdown,” *YFC*, August 1958, 22.

¹³ Thomas D. Snyder, *120 Years of Higher Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, January 1993), 77.

¹⁴ Ben Weiss, “How to Choose a College,” *YFC*, February 1958, 24-25.

“sin,” maintaining that the environment might hone spiritual fitness better than a “Christian corral.” Ultimately, individual students must not rely upon the standards God had set for someone else but upon God’s will for them “personally.”¹⁵

As more evangelical teenagers pursued university degrees—rates of evangelical college attendance tripled between 1960 and 1972—they increasingly engaged with mainstream American culture.¹⁶ Engstrom captured the world shaping his young constituency in late 1959:

...the age in which all of us are living is, in many ways, different from any we’ve seen before. The Atomic Age has given way to the Space Age, and in the transition something has happened to the world’s values. The price tags are all mixed up, so much so that one popular singer earns more in five minutes than the average teacher does in one year! A recent news release states that there are now more TV sets in the US than there are bath tubs! Too many young people, patterning their lives after materialistically-minded adults, are more concerned about making a living than they are making a life, and all because they have a distorted sense of values.¹⁷

YFC leaders especially feared that American abundance and leisure had sapped students’ zeal for foreign missions, as confirmed by magazine content from 1958 onward. In the March 1958 Missions Special Issue, a YFC representative in Singapore asked readers, “Are you too chicken to be a missionary?” and reminded them of the objective need for workers to save souls for eternity.¹⁸ The 1959 special issue minced no words. In light of 2,000 unfilled positions missionary agencies were advertising, a panel of high schoolers (two female, one male) answered the question, “Where are the teenage volunteers?” Panelists blamed the allure of domestic safety and prosperity, as well as the failure of some Christian youth to consecrate themselves fully. YFC leaders responded by rallying teenagers to use their

¹⁵ C. Stacey Woods, “College This Fall? You’re on Your Own,” *YFC*, October 1959, 15.

¹⁶ Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 24.

¹⁷ Engstrom, “Dr. Ted Talks to Teachers,” *YFC*, October 1959, 26.

¹⁸ Joe Weatherly, “Are you too chicken to be a missionary?” *YFC*, March 1958, 22.

unprecedented opportunities to advance the kingdom. International Secretary Dave Breese wrote in April 1959:

Is it possible that, after two thousand years of church history, God is concentrating...upon teenagers?...Can it be that God is placing this world's destiny in your trembling young hands, Christian teen-ager? The answer is yes—a thousand times yes. If you are a young Christian, God has built into your life fantastic capability, amazing potential, and great responsibility.¹⁹

Breese punctuated his largely inspirational appeal with a sobering point:

Millions in our world now stand at the crossroads. On the one hand is the yawning chasm of death and hell; on the other, the vistaed hope of everlasting life. Which way will they turn? In their blindness, they call upon you, and you alone can make the difference. What does this mean to you? Maybe it means a new definition of 'sacrifice.'.... Get God's advice as to what course your life must now take. The situation is unprecedented....hear the plaintive cry of a lost generation then be sure that your heart makes the right response to The Voice from above that says, 'Teen-ager, I give you the world.'²⁰

In the 1960 special missions issue, Bob Savage, recently returned from his ten-year YFC post in South America, echoed Breese:

A hundred thousand souls a day are passing into eternity—most of them to begin eternal condemnation, and we are 'casual' and 'at ease.' Instead of being 'casual' we need an intense passion for the lost, a deep suffering, a soul anguish, a sacrificial spirit and a willingness to go to the uttermost to get our message to the needy millions!²¹

Rather than allow "gadgets, waste of time and money, and carelessness" to ruin one's testimony, he implored, "Give your life to Christ *now* and make your life count!"²²

The April 1960 issue tackled "The Vanishing Teenager," those who volunteered for the field but later abandoned the commitment.²³ Results of a "National Teen Christian Survey" suggested that teens' high enthusiasm for missions did not translate into career

¹⁹ Breese, "I give you the world," *YFC*, April 1959, 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bob Savage, "So this is Home!" *YFC*, March 1960, 29.

²² Ibid.

²³ Vincent Brushweyler, "The Vanishing Teenager," *YFC*, April 1960, 14-15.

choice. “67% of the young people say they are willing to be full-time missionaries, while only 5% give a definite ‘no’ answer. Another 28% checked ‘I don’t know.’” Editors commented, “Here’s something to think about: 63% of the teens who said they had never led a soul to Christ, stated they were willing to be full-time missionaries! They must have a peculiar idea of what a missionary is!” Similarly, well over 90% of respondents enjoyed hearing missionaries speak, liked to read missionary stories, and contributed to missionary causes. While one-third indicated that the Church had “succeeded in taking the Gospel into all the world,” the rest, two-thirds, said that the job had “not been done.” The most common responses to the question, “Why do teenagers fail to dedicate themselves to Christ for missionary service?” suggested that teenagers were “unwilling to pay the price and give up the way of life they enjoyed,” “not fully yielded to the Lord,” or lacking a “burden for the lost.”²⁴ Oddly, in the same issue president emeritus Robert Cook, who edited the magazine’s advice column, supported a reader thinking of reneging on a missionary call. Cook replied that if the inquirer had been keeping up with daily devotion and “doing your best to walk with Him,” it was likely that “God wanted you to say ‘yes’ for His will for your life—*anything including missionary service*. Now...he may be leading you in some other direction different than foreign missions.”²⁵

Thus, as the 1960s dawned, guilt-inducing calls to the foreign mission field still permeated YFC culture. Meanwhile, leaders observed a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape that demanded innovative strategies for evangelization, including non-professional missionary vocations.²⁶ The 1958 missions issue featured an article from Breese, “Work while you serve,” that sketched the life of an American oil-industry professional working in

²⁴ “The American Christian Teen-Ager Survey,” *YFC*, April 1960, 7-11.

²⁵ Robert Cook, “Just Between Us,” *YFC*, April 1960, 47.

²⁶ Helpful histories include Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

South America who used his free time to witness for Christ, while enjoying a comfortable salary and lifestyle. Christian youth should be burdened to carry the gospel to the world; that was unquestioned. But need they endure the traditional missionary sacrifices?²⁷ This reality underscored Engstrom's vision for a "Decade of Destiny" in December 1959, as follows:

One fact is apparent: missionary doors are closing around the world. China used to be open, today it is closed. Other nations are rapidly closing their doors to the traditional full-time Christian missionary. This means that, if we are to win the world for Christ, we must use new methods and go at it with new abandon.

On these "new methods," he elaborated:

You may not be able to go to some nation ten years from now as a missionary, but you can go as a chemist, or a teacher, or a geologist. There will always be a need for engineers in the oil fields of Iran, but a missionary can never work there. On the coffee plantations of Brazil, in the emerging industries of India, in the mines of South Africa—there you can go and live and work for Jesus Christ.²⁸

Indeed, the advance of both Communism and decolonization undercut America's postwar global hegemony. The 1960 liberation of seventeen African nations from European colonial rule instigated a volatile backlash against Anglo-American influences generally.²⁹ While Africans sought nationalistic "Self-Development," YFC leaders told students to pursue their own.

In January 1960, Engstrom issued the Decade of Destiny's first "Marching Orders" and underlying credo: "'Christ constantly in command. Christ completely in control.' These eight words are going to revolutionize your world over the next ten years." By 1970, he presumed, many readers would be "out of college, trained, ready to go to work" or perhaps finishing graduate studies, possibly bereft of their current "sense of obligation...to win others to Christ" when "the world will need you more than ever." He presciently declared, "Nations will rise and fall, backward countries will modernize; new scientific achievements

²⁷ Breese, "Serve while you work," *YFC*, March 1958, 9.

²⁸ Engstrom, "You Can Be a Capital Teen," *YFC*, December 1959, 8-9.

²⁹ See Westad, *Global Cold War*, 207-49.

will make today's world look like the [1800s] and population increases will challenge the Christians as never before." He guaranteed one of three possible outcomes: "complete moral collapse," Christ's second coming, or a history-transforming "moral and spiritual revolution" led by dedicated teenagers.³⁰ To greet this new world, he claimed, "God has given us a plan that will, we believe, challenge, change, and channel the lives of thousands of teenagers like you so that they will count the most for Christ in these amazing days." Two principles anchored the plan. First, God used "teen-agers to reach other teen-agers, and through them to reach a world." Second, God used only those teenagers for whom Christ was "constantly in command" and "completely in control"—whether "in the classroom, in the home, on a date, in a parked car, at work, everywhere." This was "practical dedication with an eternal purpose." Phase one of the Decade of Destiny program entailed "boot training" in a high-school YFC Club, wherein students would begin searching for God's place for them in a "changing world." After graduation students would attend college for one to two years, dedicate one year to overseas mission service with YFC, then return to college with their "eyes opened." YFC's Overseas Department would plan the one-year term abroad, supplying all the materials and arranging for local YFC workers to run "basic training" through various seminars and retreats. Out of college, program participants would step into the world "fully equipped to help reap the harvest, not necessarily as a full-time missionary, but certainly as a full-time Christian doing full-time soul-winning."³¹

YFC's Teen Reaching Teens strategy mirrored CCC's maxim, "win the campus today, the world tomorrow," while the magazine began to spread the gospel of God's plan. These developments were hardly coincidental, given Engstrom's friendship with Bright and awareness that CCC would be the future base for many university-bound YFC students. Starting in the mid-1950s, *YFC* featured athletes and entertainers connected to CCC and

³⁰ Engstrom, "Design for a Decade of Destiny," *YFC*, January 1960, 6-7.

³¹ Ibid.

Mears's Hollywood circle, including Colleen Townsend Evans.³² In 1959 a female musician associated with the Hollywood Christian Group gushed about her wonderful life since finding God's plan:

And now, six years later, I am married to a preacher! (Girls, what happiness!). God has everything for you, if He has *you*. The Christ-directed life is more wonderful than my limited description can reveal. God promises to 'give thee the desires of thine heart, if you will 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness' (Matt 6.33). Will you do what I did? Will you give Jesus Christ full control of your life today? Then, you will be really happy!³³

In March 1961, Bright spoke on the power of the Holy Spirit at YFC's annual executive meeting, the Midwinter Convention, and he encouraged closer partnership between their two organizations.³⁴ The previous summer, in June, Engstrom had shared the southern-California gospel of God's plan with *YFC* readers. Advising readers on how to determine their "Date with Destiny," he said, "It boils down to this, God has a wonderful plan for your life, and, as you work with Him, that plan is fulfilled. In fact, the instant you received Christ into your life, you became a part of destiny! This started you on the exciting path that leads to fulfilling God's eternal purpose in your life!"³⁵

Engstrom's "Marching Orders" produced as much anxiety as they did inspiration. God imbued individuals from birth with "all the talents, abilities, and potential necessary to fulfill God's purpose for your life." Used according to God's guidance and for His glory, those talents would lead to a "meaningful, happy, successful life." Without the initial "surrender" to Christ, he warned, "you *can* frustrate God's will for your life, you know. You *can* miss God's very best for your life, His 'good and acceptable and perfect will.'" Implying far worse consequences than career dissatisfaction, he quoted the first half of Phil. 2:12, "Work out your own salvation," which many readers probably knew was followed by the

³² Carol Thiessen, "Under New Management," *YFC*, May 1960, 26-27.

³³ Gloria Rae, "I Thought I Was Happy!" *YFC*, April 1959, 14-15.

³⁴ Minutes of the 1961 Midwinter Convention, YFC Records.

³⁵ Engstrom, "Marching Order, No.5: A Date with Destiny," *YFC*, June 1960, 20-21.

phrase, “with fear and trembling.” As part of God’s “eternal purpose,” he said, “everything you do is, in reality, a ‘date with destiny’.” Vocational tests were useful, but only by reading the Bible daily, praying, and surrendering one’s “body, mind, and will” could one obtain “the assurance of God’s guidance for every decision.” To discover one’s “place in destiny,” one must “admit,” “confess,” and then “drop” anything “contrary to God’s will.” Readers who had “already planned” life without “consulting God” must “get that straightened out, too.” In especially nerve-wrecking language, he said, “the longer you wait, the farther along you’ll go on some detour that’s taking you away from his eternal plan for your life.” The wording implied that missing God’s plan for one’s earthly work could mean missing out on eternal salvation. Despite this admonition, he cheerfully concluded, “You are important to God—so important that He planned a wonderful life for you ages ago, sent His son to die for you, and today wants to direct your life, choose your career, and make you wonderfully happy.”³⁶

In his teaching on how to discern God’s wonderful plan, Engstrom also followed Mears and Bright. Phil. 2:13— “for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure“ (RSV)—was a Decade of Destiny “theme verse,” invoked to support the mantra, “Christ constantly in command, Christ completely in control.”³⁷ Elsewhere in the June 1960 issue, Breese, then directing Chicagoland Youth for Christ, also cited Phil. 2:13 in his one-page, step-by-step guide, “How do I know the will of God for my life?” Stressing the internal, almost imperceptible leading of God, he taught, “You must have the proper combination of wisdom and revelation,” explaining that wisdom encompassed all the “human advice, education, help, and counsel that you can receive of men.” In a claim that seemed to contradict evangelical biblicism,³⁸ Breese did not limit “revelation” to the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See ch. 4.

³⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, 2-17.

Scriptures, defining it as “what God makes clear to your own heart; sometimes in seeming ‘illogical’ fashion beyond [your] human understanding, but always right.” God’s will, despite its seeming irrationality at times, should align with the dedicated Christian’s desires. “In short, teen-ager, the will of God for you is not tearing you up by the roots and sending you where you don’t want to go. But it is the beautiful, natural, and wonderful course of a consecrated life into the greatest joy that you can possibly know. Discover while you are young: God’s way is the best way!”³⁹

In July 1960, Engstrom concluded his introduction to YFC’s ten-year plan with a photo essay highlighting non-professional missionary careers, specifically U.S. diplomat, geologist, medical doctor, agriculturalist, aviator, and engineer. Deeming these “vehicles for soul-winners,” he could have added that they were vehicles for Communist containment.

As nations grow and expand in their industry and culture, they look to us in the US to provide leadership and training. *The Communists are sending their engineers and scientists to spread the gospel of Communism!* We must train thousands of Christians to take the Gospel of Christ to these lands!

Our goal in YFC is to see by 1970 an army of 10,000 dedicated and trained Christians, spread across the world to win the world for Christ. Some will be missionaries; others will be ‘non-professional’ missionaries specializing in various trades and callings; but *all* will be soul-winners.⁴⁰

Thus, Engstrom heralded YFC’s emphatic 1960s shift from full-time Christian *service* to “full-time Christian living.” As he put it, “Christ is constantly in command, Christ is completely in control (Phil. 2:13), so that whatever calling God gives you, you use your abilities to win souls to Christ.” Clearly convinced that God worked within the individual to will and to do His work—the Phil. 2:13 principle—he closed, “Read this material carefully, and let God speak to your heart.”⁴¹

In the same issue, YFC Overseas Director Sam Woglemuth tried to put Engstrom’s long-term vision in immediate, practical terms. In “Where do I go from here?” he said:

³⁹ Breese, “How Do I Know the Will of God for My Life?” *YFC*, June 1960, 29.

⁴⁰ Engstrom, “Have Talent, Will Travel,” *YFC*, July 1960, 18-19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Every Christian should be a missionary in the profession God gives him. Now, this is not to minimize the dedicated full-time workers who have helped circle the globe with the Gospel. Not at all! In fact, it would be wonderful if God would call *you* into a challenging life such as that! But many teen-agers say, “I don’t feel that God wants me to be a preacher or a missionary. What can *I* do to help reach the world for Christ? ...make sure your heart is burdened for the lost, and then train for a profession that will enable you to influence others for Christ.”⁴²

Acknowledging that many such professions paid well, he duly warned youth against being led astray by dollar signs. Pursuing influence, not wealth, was the goal—which was also a foundational plank of Campus Crusade for Christ’s “win the winners” strategy.⁴³

“Teen Teams” formed the core of Engstrom’s Decade of Destiny program. Teams of approximately twelve teenagers took short-term trips abroad to reach other teens, under the auspices of international YFC directors. The innovative program prefigured some elements of the United States Peace Corps introduced by President John F. Kennedy in March 1961. The Peace Corps stationed university graduates in developing countries for at least two years to promote cultural understanding and diplomacy.⁴⁴ Although YFC’s strategy was evangelistic, both Teen Teams and the Peace Corps offered young adults cross-cultural experience and avenues of service without requiring a long-term occupation. Engstrom noted the similarities right away. At the July 1961 annual YFC convention, he reported on Teen Teams who had returned from Europe. “The basic concept of YFC is that teen-agers can best reach other teen-agers for Christ and the church,” he said in his plenary speech. “These teen-agers have accomplished in a few months what adult workers might not be able to accomplish in years. These teams are in a very real sense an evangelical Peace Corps, bringing Christ to the youth of the world.”⁴⁵

⁴² Sam Woglemuth, “Where Do I Go From Here?” *YFC*, July 1960, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 59-60.

Confident in the short-term Teen Teams strategy, YFC leaders relegated the traditional, lifelong missionary career to a secondary place in their priorities. *YFC* ceased publishing the annual “Missions Special Issue,” as it had every March in the 1950s. The March 1961 issue, circulating in the wake of Kennedy’s Peace Corp announcement, instead featured a guide to obtaining the highest-paid job in one’s professional field. Its author, YFC’s Greater Washington D.C. director and a veteran Vice President of Sales at Heinz, Inc., advised the student to first “discover what you can do,” or to “find God’s will for your life.” By accepting Christ as savior and committing to pray, read the Bible, and put Him first in daily life, the student would open a door for God to reveal the next steps.⁴⁵

PLP, although no longer conflated with traditional missionary careers, nevertheless remained at the forefront of YFC’s message. One month after touting his Evangelical Peace Corps at Winona, Engstrom dedicated his August 1961 editorial to a cautionary tale about a high-school senior rejected from college because he never found his “purpose” and “direction.” “Carry a Campus Compass” advised students returning from summer vacation to start evaluating their talents and gathering information about various careers. The most significant step to developing “your own personal campus compass,” he said, was “dedication...turning yourself over to God and letting Him direct your life.” He continued, “After all, when you were born, God put into you the interests and abilities that you now have. It’s wonderful to know that God has a perfect plan for every life. And when you follow in God’s will and do what He wants you to do, you can’t help but have success and satisfaction.” Reiterating a major plank of the Decade of Destiny program, he taught that by “surrender[ing]” to Christ and continuing to obey Him, “you will discover the truth of Phil. 2:13.” Guidance came from within, as God changed a person’s will to accomplish His own.

⁴⁵ Press Release, 1961 YFC Convention, Winona Lake, July 9, 1961, box 13, folder 57, YFC Records, BGCA.

⁴⁶ Chuck Harwood, “Choose Your Own Salary,” *YFC*, March 1961, 14-15.

“Keep going in the direction that God has planned for you,” he promised, and you’ll discover the happiness and success that God wants you to have.”⁴⁷

As the same issue revealed, by 1961, Overseas Director Woglemuth already felt compelled to remind students that foreign missionaries were still needed. Referencing a recent InterVarsity study revealing that mission agencies were advertising 4,000 overseas vacancies, with over a third in non-ministerial fields like education, translation, medicine, and radio, he conceded, “I realize that *any* legitimate career can be used for the glory of God.” There was “room for the Christian in government service overseas, as a teacher or doctor, or perhaps in some industry. *But there is also the need for the full-time Christian worker!*” Christian writers and editors were especially needed to supply books and magazines to newly “literate peoples” before Communist propaganda reached them first—a spiritual “containment” strategy.⁴⁸ Granting that some countries accessible a few years ago no longer were, he maintained that hundreds of doors remained open, and God could open more. Japan exemplified one of the many nations with an uncertain future that, at least for the moment, was bursting with opportunities for American influence, as Woglemuth had seen during his recent evangelistic crusade with Bob Pierce in Japan. Overall, the Christian teenager need only worry about the door separating the high-school classroom from the outside world. “The teen-ager with ability, training, and determination, can almost ‘take his pick’ of job opportunities. If the doors close on you after you graduate, it will probably be because of what you did after you closed that classroom door when you were in high school.” Daydreaming during class “closed the door” on “future success and achievement.” Fortunately, readers could “still prepare to live life that will make a difference in this turbulent world!” He closed, “And I hope that you will; for never has the world needed

⁴⁷ Engstrom, “Carry a Campus Compass,” *YFC*, August 1961, 2-5.

⁴⁸ William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-60: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), argues that mainline Protestants drove the American campaign to stop the spread of Communism in Eastern Europe, Africa, and other regions apart of the newly created “Third World.”

dedicated youth like it does today. ‘Behold, I have set before you an open door!’⁴⁹ By anchoring his open-doors metaphor on Rev. 3:8, Woglemuth infused end-times urgency into his plea for vocational commitment. If this did not burden teenage readers enough, another August 1961 article summarized the Christian concept of “sin” as “just falling short of God’s plan for your life.”⁵⁰

YFC leaders assured American teenagers that God offered them a personalized, world-changing purpose, perhaps as one of 10,000 university-trained, overseas professionals they hoped to mobilize by 1970. Other Americans did not share this confidence. In May 1960 *Life* magazine’s Henry Luce introduced a multi-issue series addressing the “National Purpose,” inspired by statesman and intellectual Walter Lippman’s prophetic observation: “The critical weakness of our society is that for the time being our people do not have great purposes which they are united in wanting to achieve.”⁵¹ Luce invited Billy Graham, a personal friend, to reflect on the national purpose in light of America’s Christian heritage.⁵² Graham’s June editorial called for a national “return to God” to combat over-indulgence and moral laxity. The question of national purpose continued to stimulate conversation during and after the November 1960 election of the nation’s first Catholic president.⁵³

In July 1962, over two years after the *Life* series debuted, YFC asked teenagers, “What do you think our national purpose is? Do we have one?” Only one of the seven respondents featured answered affirmatively, saying that Americans, increasingly educated, continued to search for “new goals” to accomplish. Overall, the responses suggested that YFC’s constituency agreed with Graham that Americans had grown more concerned about

⁴⁹ Woglemuth, “The Door Between,” *YFC*, August 1961, 14-15.

⁵⁰ “What Are You Talking About?” *YFC*, August 1961, 17.

⁵¹ “The National Purpose,” *Life*, May 23, 1960.

⁵² Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 75, discusses the men’s significant friendship.

⁵³ Billy Graham, “Men Must Be Changed Before a Nation Can,” *Life*, June 6, 1960, 109.

material prosperity than threats to Christian values. Respondents reaffirmed Americans' duty to evangelize the Communist world, with one patriotic student maintaining, "we must be careful never to divorce our national purpose from our Christian purpose." One student, Engstrom said, "summed it up the best" with the following words: "'We are tomorrow's leaders and we will then have to cope with world problems. It is our job as Christian teenagers to tell others about Christ and to try to bring our nation back to God. If we would really witness to our friends, we could win our generation for Christ.'"⁵⁴ Engstrom's editorial for the issue called for renewed patriotism among American teenagers manifesting itself in sharing Christ with their peers.⁵⁵

The July 1962 issue coincided with YFC's annual convention. In his departmental report, Literature Department head Paul B. Smith reflected upon the Teen-reaching-Teens strategy's broader significance:

Youth for Christ has gone through several stages—each making its own peculiar impact. It started with a lot of glamour and glitter, loud ties, trained horses, and brilliant young men. Those were the days of the huge mass rallies—sometimes with more old folk than young—but great. Those were also the days of bitter criticism, but remember—those were the days that produced Billy Graham. The second stage was characterized by a missionary thrust. World Congresses were held all over the globe...and young evangelists and singers saw things that have revolutionized their ministries ever since. But still the appeal was to people in general rather than Youth in particular. Now Y.F.C. has really come of age and is doing the thing that God called it into being to do. It is concentrating almost exclusively on teenagers. This is the New Dimension and the only answer to the problems of this Space Age. Mature people are set in their ways. The college crowd is too sophisticated. Teenagers are still pliable.⁵⁶

The "New Dimension" coincided with and contributed to YFC's push for higher education and the decline of traditional American foreign missions. Eager to uphold American evangelical influence abroad, the Engstrom-era YFC adapted the ministry's missionary

⁵⁴ "What Teens Say About the National Purpose, *YFC*, July 1962, 40-41.

⁵⁵ Engstrom, "What's All This About Patriotism?" *YFC*, July 1962, 12-15.

⁵⁶ Paul B. Smith, "Youth for Christ in a New Dimension" (address, 1961 YFC Convention, July 1962), box 13, folder 59, YFC Records, BGCA.

program to professional specialization and pitched it to students through the southern-California language of God's wonderful plan for their lives.

Engstrom resigned from his YFC presidency in February 1963, joining the executive staff of World Vision, International. A few months later, contributing editor (and future YFC President) Jay Kesler seemed to question Engstrom's legacy with the piece, "Have teenagers turned their back on full-time Christian service?" Too many adults, he said, encouraged students to prioritize "security" and "respectability" in their career choices, which the Decade of Destiny program could be accused of, given its focus on white-collar influence. Rather than appealing to the Great Commission, Kessler said Christian service was more rewarding and fulfilling than any other career. Ultimately, he cautioned, "If God is speaking to you about it, don't pass it off lightly. There is nothing worse than to find yourself, no matter how successful you are, outside the will of God."⁵⁷

Renewing the Mind and the Missionary Call: IVCF and Urbana

YFC and IVCF entered the 1960s aware that global upheaval stymied traditional, Western-led foreign missions. IVCF, meanwhile, labored to reconcile the divine missionary *call* to the modern collegiate mind. Staffers distributed the revised missionary decision card throughout the year to local chapters and again during the triennial Urbana conferences. Instead of pressuring students to decide, unequivocally, for a future overseas career, the new card asked students only to indicate where they presently *felt* God leading them--if not to the mission field, then at least to "seek[ing] God's will" regarding possible missionary service at home or abroad. Among other cautions, Charles Hummel's 1958 staff manual warned against fostering a culture of superiority among prospective missionaries.⁵⁸ During the 1957-58 academic term, which included an Urbana convention, 1,702 total students submitted

⁵⁷ Jay Kesler, "Have Teenagers Turned Their Backs on Full-Time Christian Service?" *YFC*, May 1963, 10-13.

⁵⁸ Charles Hummel, *Campus Christian Witness: An Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship Manual* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 110-111.

cards, doubling submissions from 1945-55, the most recent Urbana year. Of these, 1,147 students chose “seek God’s will,” compared to 555 students who believed God was calling them to overseas service. The 1958-59 academic year, however, did not continue the upward trend: A mere 446 total students submitted cards, split evenly between those preparing to serve and those discerning God’s call to service.⁵⁹

In March 1959 *HIS* editor Joe Bayly reflected on the current generation’s driving concern. “Holiness,” he said, “may have been the passion of another generation’s Christian young men and women. Or soul winning, Or evangelizing the world in their generation. But not today. Today the theme is getting to know the will of God.”⁶⁰ During the 1960s, theological and philosophical radicalism confounded the search not simply for God’s will but for theism itself. Hummel sought to stem the tide of secularization by bolstering IVCF faculty advisors on campus and cultivating the next generation of Christian professors.⁶¹ PLP followed suit as IVCF’s constituency resisted emotional excess for intellectual savvy, with some members blatantly attacking evangelicals’ sacred cows. A piece in the November 1960 *HIS*, simply entitled “Revolution,” set the tone. In the personal testimony a former leader in the Student Foreign Missionary Fellowship—IVCF’s organizational partner since 1945—recounted finding freedom from two of the movement’s driving convictions: first, that he was personally responsible for every unsaved individual’s eternal fate, and second, that transgressing from the “center of God’s will” doomed him to a “second-best” life.⁶² Such high-pressure piety, he came to believe, was both psychologically damaging and theologically anemic.

⁵⁹ “Missionary Decision Card Totals since 1950-51,” May 11, 1966, box 17, “Urbana: Statistics,” Acc. 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

⁶⁰ Joe Bayly, “Of Doors and Hinges,” Editorial, *HIS*, March 1959.

⁶¹ Hunt and Hunt, 143.

⁶² James Ney, “Revolution,” *HIS*, November 1960, 32-36.

IVCF faced an uphill battle regarding missionary recruitment. The Briton Eric Fife, appointed Missions Department Director in 1958, sought to improve outcomes through strategic reform, specifically by buttressing intellectual sophistication. Although he lacked a university degree, Fife's years working for the Africa Inland Mission boosted his credentials, as the continent struggled for independence and modernization. Directing Urbana '61, '64, and '67, Fife reformed IVCF's missionary rhetoric from predominantly *pathos* to *logos*.⁶³ As he explained in later interviews, he sought to make the convention "respectable," appealing to the attendee's "will" through the "mind" rather than the "heart" through the "emotions."⁶⁴ Thus, he organized speakers to lead topical panel sessions, specialized workshops, and discussion forums to better prepare and motivate students to join the modernized missionary enterprise. In simultaneous small-group Forums, teams of speakers addressed pre-selected questions. During Urbana '61's Day 1 Forum, for example, the starting discussion point was: "What is a missionary call?"⁶⁵ Presumably, students received conflicting answers based upon their assigned Forum group.

As in previous conventions, a representative from the missionary branch of the ecumenical student movement (in 1954, renamed the Commission on World Mission, part of the National Student Christian Federation) attended Urbana to observe. Ann Finkle, enrolled at Elmhurst College—ten miles east of Wheaton College in suburban Chicago—mailed a three-page report to the Commission on World Mission in early 1962. In her opinion, some aspects of the convention seemed "to indicate that the differences between us are not so great as those of us who have had only superficial contact with Inter-Varsity commonly think." Some of Fife's changes, it appeared, had paid off. Finkle particularly applauded the morning

⁶³ Rodger Bassham, *Mission Theology, 1948–1975: Years of Worldwide Creative Tension—Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 187–88; see also Charles van Engen, "A Broadening Vision," in *Earthen Vessels*, ed. Carpenter and Shenk, 211–16.

⁶⁴ Eric Fife, interview by Keith Hunt, October 27, 1988, tape 135, IVCF Records, BGCA. See also Hunt and Hunt, 236–38.

⁶⁵ "Urbana 61: Forums," Box 16, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

panel discussions led by Clyde Taylor, director of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, Fuller Seminary missiologist Arthur Glasser, and renowned anthropologist and linguist Eugene Nida. These sessions, she said, “would have been a credit to any conference,” as speakers took a “scholarly approach” “almost totally lacking in the keynote presentations,” and made positive reference to the ecumenical movement. There was “even some joking about the overzealous approach which we tend to associate with InterVarsity.”⁶⁶

Despite these endorsements, she labeled her small group’s Bible-study discussions “superficial,” eliciting “answers which would have been embarrassingly obvious to a disinterested 12-year-old.” Attendees and speakers, overall, exuded a type of spirituality which, to a mainline Protestant collegian, seemed rather jejune. Questions about obtaining personal salvation, for example, “brought replies which indicated a vastly different understanding of the way God works than I’ve ever heard expressed by a college student.” The ubiquity of an individualistic view of God’s providence and of the church’s mission befuddled Finkle the most:

God’s direct and personal will for the individual was read into each of life’s events. For example, ‘The Lord knew I wanted to be a Nurse, but that I was only willing to give myself to him on my own conditions. So He taught me humility by making me do secretarial work before He opened...the doors to nursing for me.’ (Please note: I’m not scoffing at all—just relating.) The discussion of any social or political dimension of Christian responsibility was conspicuously absent from all our discussions, and the few times our group began to explore a question in this area, the leader would solve the issue with a pious platitude about the Lord working in strange and wondrous ways, etc. The emphasis in our prayer group, and in the entire conference, was on evangelism.⁶⁷

Despite the delegates’ fixation on God’s will, Urbana ‘61’s plenary addresses did not provide clear instruction on discerning a missionary call. Lawrence Love, Jr., the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s Overseas Director, delivered the morning Bible messages. Focusing on the theme of “discipleship,” Love portrayed discerning God’s will as

⁶⁶ Ann Finkle to Douglas Cook, January 14, 1962, Series IX, Box 648, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions Records, Yale Divinity Archives, New Haven, CT.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

a question of following Christ, moment by moment, making sure one had appropriated the Holy Spirit's power before embarking on any evangelistic task.⁶⁸

Debriefing in January 1962, the planning committee agreed that speakers had successfully communicated the idea that all Christians, by nature of being Christ's disciples and witnesses, were already called to be missionaries in their current positions and places.⁶⁹ Fife had promulgated this view in his primer for convention attendees, *Man's Peace, God's Glory*, as follows:

Whether we go abroad or stay at home, these are callings that we all have, whatever may be our paid occupation. But we are not all called to be foreign missionaries for Jesus Christ, and to go to the field without being called by Him is disastrous. There are missionaries on the foreign field who have told me they went out of a sense of obligation, because they felt that it was the 'done thing for every keen Christian to do.' A person is hardly likely to stand the disappointments of work abroad unless he is truly called by the Lord and equipped by Him. It should be mentioned that we ought to be just as cautious about a call to undertake any profession in the homeland as we are about foreign service.⁷⁰

On the one hand, de-mystifying the missionary call might broaden participation, as students ceased waiting for a sign from heaven. On the other hand, if there was nothing special about the missionary call, its true nature might become even more enigmatic. Finally, if every Christian already had a missionary calling to their current location, then why bother signing up? Only 20% of Urbana '61 attendees submitted missionary decision cards—compared to 95% of the delegates to Urbana '51—with 400 students indicating that they were “called” to missions and 800 committed to seeking God's will for their lives.⁷¹ The returns from the next two academic years were the lowest yet recorded: from 177 called and 209 seeking in 1962-

⁶⁸ Lawrence Love, “The Demands of Discipleship (Morning Talks),” in *Commission, Conflict, Commitment*, ed. Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 215-56 (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962).

⁶⁹ Urbana 64: Planning Committee Minutes, January 15, 1962, box 17, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

⁷⁰ Fife, *Man's Peace, God's Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 136-37.

⁷¹ “What Happened at Urbana,” *HIS*, Feb 1962, 17-33.

63 to 113 called and 161 seeking in 1963-64. IVCF was not the only organization to see decline.

In the April 1964 issue of *Moody Monthly*, missiologist J. Herbert Kane implored, “Where today are the apostle Pauls, the David Livingstones, the Henry Martyns, the Mary Slessors? Are they gone forever? Are we unable... in this soft and silken generation to produce that kind of personality? The only group of people in the twentieth century who approximate the early Christians are the disciples of Karl Marx.” The following month, the May-June 1964 issue of the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association’s newsletter quoted Kane’s lament in its front-page report on “neglected opportunities.”⁷² In fall 1964, the Evangelical Foreign Missions Agency (EFMA), affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals, and the IFMA cooperated to release a new journal, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, intended to “represent the best in evangelical missionary thinking.” From the very first issue, the “candidate shortage” received attention. In “Hand Wringing or Hard Questions?” Horace Fenton, Jr., Secretary of the Latin American Mission, affirmed, “there is no question that many mission boards have reported a falling off in the number of candidates in the last few years,” interpreting the situation as follows:

...our times have changed: transportation to and from the field is swift, and relatively economical; there are some openings for missionary service where a short term is preferable, for the work as well as the worker. Besides, many Christian young people come to the close of their college careers without yet being sure of the Lord’s leading for their lives, and, seeking a way of knowing the needs and opportunities in foreign lands, will find such a way through the Peace Corps, if missions will not offer it to them. Must we pretend to them that faith is a leap in the dark—that there is no legitimate way of investigating an unknown situation and their fitness for it, as a part of the process of seeking the Lord’s will?⁷³

Fife, who attended the IFMA’s and EFMA’s 1964 conventions, reported to the Urbana planning committee in October that “great concern was expressed about the drop in

⁷² Edwin L. Frizen, Jr., “Neglected Opportunity,” IFMA News, May-June 1964, 3.

⁷³ Horace Fenton, Jr., “Hand Wringing or Hard Questions?” An Approach to the Missionary Candidate Shortage, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1964): 28.

missionary recruitment, and both spoke of the [Urbana] convention as being very important. Saying he “came away with a tremendous sense of urgency” after the meetings, he exhorted the committee, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers.”⁷⁴ Earlier that year, Fife had responded to the challenges Fenton outlined—but not in the way he desired—by agreeing to allow Peace Corps representatives to recruit students at Urbana. The Briton, fearing “the danger of identifying missionary endeavor with the American government,” had resisted the idea previously. However, at the February 1964 planning committee meeting, he conceded, “Events have indicated that some students should be encouraged to enter the Peace Corps as one form of Christian vocation.”⁷⁵ Rather than establish, as Engstrom attempted, an “Evangelical Peace Corps,” Fife opted for the Evangelicals-*in-the*-Peace Corps approach, a strategy which cosmopolitan university students—and third-world nationals—might more readily embrace.

Fenton opened the 1964 convention by addressing the “hurricane” surrounding missions work, produced by threats of “population explosion,” “communism,” “nationalism,” “resurgent national religions,” and radical theology. Despite the challenges, he told students to make themselves available to Christ. “It isn’t a question of volunteering to be a missionary on some foreign field. Let the Lord take care of the ‘where’; that can come, please God, at some later time.”⁷⁶ Other speakers addressed racial injustice, poverty, violence, and Western imperialism. Graham closed the year by urging students to make whatever “commitment” God wanted—and to avoid making any superficial commitments to the mission field.⁷⁷ The missionary decision card figures for the 1964-65 academic year were revealing. Although Urbana ’64 welcomed 7,000 delegates, only 400 *total* cards had arrived

⁷⁴ Urbana ’64: Planning Committee Minutes, October 15, 1964, box 17, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

⁷⁵ Urbana ’64: Planning Committee Minutes, February 3, 1964, box 17, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

⁷⁶ Fenton, Jr., “Change, Witness, Triumph,” in *Change, Witness, Triumph: The Seventh Inter-Varsity Missionary Convention* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1965), 231, 239.

⁷⁷ Graham, “Triumph and Commitment,” in *Change, Witness, Triumph*, 300-301.

by the Monday following the convention.⁷⁸ Throughout the year, 1,928 students submitted cards—with 502 “called” and 1,426 “seeking,” the highest number of seekers yet. Thus, as IVCF entered the late 1960s, missionary “decisions” were not keeping pace with Urbana’s growth, and students were far more likely to commit to seek God’s will for service, at home or abroad.

Student Ministries Meet the Class of ’65: Psychology, Morality, and Strategy

To reiterate the argument thus far: changing geopolitical, economic, and intellectual realities prompted YFC and IVCF to revise their missionary strategies, in ways leading to the traditional missionary vocation’s decline in the early 1960s. YFC’s decision to “specialize” on teenagers themselves was central. These broader structural changes happened to coincide with what Philip Rieff deemed the “Therapeutic Turn.”⁷⁹ By the early 1960s, humanistic psychology advanced by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow had pervaded American culture, including evangelicalism.⁸⁰ PLP bore the marks.

Christian psychiatrist Marion Nelson published the 1963 manual, *Knowing God’s Will*, with Moody Press, predicated the receipt of God’s guidance upon maintaining sound mental health.⁸¹ In 1965 Fuller Seminary opened a School of Psychology, alongside the Schools of Theology and World Missions. Promoting the new psychology department, professor and clinical psychologist Robert Bower deemed the goal of most Christian therapy to steer the patient toward “maximal self-actualization,” which enjoined finding God’s plan

⁷⁸ “God at Work,” *HIS*, March 1965, 21.

⁷⁹ Philip Rieff, *The Therapeutic Turn: Uses of Faith After Freud*; Ole Jacob Madsen, *The Therapeutic Turn: How Psychology Altered Western Culture* (East Sussex, Eng; New York: Routledge, 2014). See also the essays in Jonathan Imber, ed., *Therapeutic Culture: Triumph and Defeat* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

⁸⁰ See ch. 4.

⁸¹ Marion Nelson, *Knowing God’s Will* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963).

for his or her life.⁸² Finally, the works of Swiss internist Paul Tournier began to shape evangelical thinking about the relationship between the mind, body, and spirit. Tournier's most significant work, *The Meaning of Persons* (1957), said that the "person is not a fixed datum, but a potential, a development, a plan known to God, and he will lead him day by day to its fulfillment." As humans fulfilled the divine purpose, they fulfilled "their own personal destiny." Poignantly, Tournier wrote, "The person is the divine plan of our life, the guiding force, itself directed by God, who leads us towards our vocation, in spite of every deviation."⁸³ *The Person Reborn* (1966), deemed a "'must' book for the Christian who wants to understand himself more fully" by *Christianity Today*, included the chapter, "Life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit," which suggested God guided sometimes through non-rational impressions, possibly reflecting Tournier's influence by the Oxford Group.⁸⁴

As the evangelical establishment began to embrace the therapeutic, IVCF grappled with the philosophical implications. Vernon Grounds, President of the Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary (now Denver Seminary), contributed a ten-part *HIS* series, "Psychiatry and Christianity," from January 1963 to 1964. In his October 1963 entry, Grounds affirmed that Christianity's highest good was not emotional health but the glory of God. Nevertheless, as in the overall series, he harmonized Christian values with the personal quest for well-being and self-fulfillment. It was the remedy that differed: Since Christianity required a supernatural change, or "regeneration as the precondition of... self-fulfillment," it differed from "all varieties of secular person-healing." Grounds cited ecumenical theologian Albert

⁸² Robert Bower, "Some Reflections on the Fuller Seminary School of Psychology," *Theology News and Notes*, May 1967, 11.

⁸³ Paul Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 175-76. This book was ranked number 24 on the list, "The Top 50 Books that Have Shaped Evangelicals," *CT*, October 6, 2006. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/october/23.51.html> (Accessed July 26, 2018).

⁸⁴ Tournier, *The Person Reborn* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 163-73. On Tournier and his Oxford Group associations, see George Thomas Kurian and James D. Smith, *Encyclopedia of Christian Literature*, vol. 2 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 603-605. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 235-42, notes the group's embrace of a non-rational epistemology.

Outler's *Psychiatry and Christianity* (1957), which argued, "Psychotherapeutic cure, important and valuable as it is, is never enough. If men are to become themselves, truly and fully, they must also find their way into the orbit of God's mercy and grace, from which they have been strayed in self-exile."⁸⁵ In sum, major voices in both IVCF and YFC joined the chorus of mainstream theorists calling for individuals to "become themselves, truly and fully."

The therapeutic turn was *not* the primary reason for missionary malaise in YFC and IVCF, and yet the language of self-actualization and self-fulfillment complemented the student ministries' strategic focus on youth development, professional specialization, cultural influence, and intellectual respectability, emphases drawn from the impetus to evangelize the world. In the late 1950s, as YFC leaders narrowed their focus to teenagers, they became more psychologically literate. Part of this stemmed from the juvenile delinquency program, Youth Guidance/Lifeline. Clyde Narramore, the Los Angeles-based evangelical psychologist and Campus Crusade for Christ board member, helped oversee this department of YFC. In 1958 Narramore contributed excerpts from his teen-directed manual, *Young Only Once*, to the magazine. After speaking to the annual summer convention, the September 1958 issue printed an interview with Narramore, exploring how a Christian could pursue the career of "school psychologist" for missionary influence—while, incidentally, earning a high salary and professional prestige.⁸⁶

In addition to endorsing the psychology profession, in the early 1960s YFC leaders seamlessly wove the language of self-actualization into messages on PLP. An April 1960 article on career decisions, for example, bore the title, "You can find yourself."⁸⁷ Echoing Rogers's *On Becoming a Person*, Sam Woglemuth wrote in August 1961: "What you are

⁸⁵ Vernon Grounds, "Psychiatry and Christianity, Part 7: Tension Over Therapy," *HIS*, October 1963, 26.

⁸⁶ Warren Wiersbe, "Careers for Christians—Psychology," *YFC*, September 1958, 35.

⁸⁷ J. Vernon Jacobs, "You Can Find Yourself," *YFC*, April 1960, 12-13.

going to be, you are becoming right now; and one of these days you'll find yourself at the crossroads making a career choice." The following January, YFC featured a multi-page photo spread entitled "Your Fads, Fashions, Friends, and Future." The last section, "Your Future," suggested the compatibility of Rogers's insights with the Bible. "A great man said: 'You are what you are becoming.' There is no time when this is more meaningful than your teen years. In a world like yours, you can to a great degree determine your own destiny. Your future is what you make it. Proverbs 23.7 says: 'For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.'"

The most significant change occurred when YFC introduced a new paradigm for youth development: helping students achieve a "balanced life" physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Bill Eakins, National Club Director, revamped the high-school club ministry to follow the Balanced Life Concept. The January 1963 *YFC* presented the program in full, anchoring it on the familiar PLP passage, Romans 12:1-2. Those youth who "presented their bodies" as living sacrifices (physical), who were not "conformed to this world" (social), and who were transformed through the renewing of their minds (mental), would know the "perfect will of God" (spiritual).⁸⁸ Although boasting the slogan, "geared to the times, anchored to the rock," from its start, the ministry looked vastly different from the original, rally-centered movement. In the local high schools, YFC clubs were replaced by "Campus Life" clubs, which focused on reaching the non-Christian teenager in addition to the born-again students. In August 1965 *Youth for Christ* magazine published its final issue, making way for *Campus Life*, a high-gloss, neon-saturated periodical designed to attract all of "America's teens" rather than "YFC kids only."⁸⁹ Introduced as "the magazine for balanced teen living," the consumer-focused, fashion-conscious periodical specialized in American teenager culture. From 1965 to 1975, circulation grew from 30,000 to 165,000 (estimated

⁸⁸ Bill Eakin, "A Manual for Maturity," *YFC*, January 1963, 6, 17-25.

⁸⁹ "Compromise?" Assault and Flattery, *Campus Life*, September 1965, 10.

250,000 monthly readership).⁹⁰ The October issue was dedicated to students' decisions about college and career. An introductory note, "Step Into Your Future," proclaimed:

The world is yours! Even though there's a Viet Nam and a black-white crisis and greatly increasing immorality, you as a Christian teen have unprecedented freedom to choose, opportunities to grasp, and challenges to meet as you live in the most diversified and richest culture in all of history. Yet you have questions: 'Where will I go to school?' 'Which occupation is best?' 'How can I *really* know God's guidance so my future will be the exciting life of fulfillment and deep peace He promises?' 'How can I get my sights on a significant goal that will make my life count?' This special issue of *Campus Life* is designed from start to finish to help you answer just those questions—and to give you help in finding additional answers. Prepare *now* to step into your future with confidence, excitement, and most of all, *determination* to ...receive all the magnificent things He has planned for you."⁹¹

Instead of calling for missionary sacrifice or serious social reflection, *Campus Life* promised an "exciting life of fulfillment" to Baby Boomer high schoolers, while the *Four Spiritual Laws* tract shared the same message to university students.

Campus Life also displayed another momentous change in evangelical youth culture: the end of fundamentalist moral legalism.⁹² While evangelical leaders vociferously denounced situation ethics and the "new morality," the sheer ubiquity of popular culture and leisure-time amusements undermined resolute commitment to legalistic, separationist standards.⁹³ The new liberty was already evident in the late 1950s. In 1958, MBI's S. Maxwell Coder published a revised version of his 1946 correspondence course, *God's Will*

⁹⁰ "Harold Myra on Youth for Christ's Magazine's Change to *Campus Life*," <http://www.yfc.net/about/storiesblog/youth-for-christ-magazine-increases-circulation-by-becoming-campus-life> (Accessed June 1, 2018). Myra subsequently became the editor of *Christianity Today*.

⁹¹ "Step Into Your Future," *Campus Life*, October 1965, 5.

⁹² See, for example, George Marsden, appendix to *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 305-307. Marsden surveyed alumni of Fuller Seminary, flagship neo-evangelical institution, from the classes of 1950-52, 1957-59, and 1965-67. Survey responses revealed that younger alumni had significantly more permissive attitudes toward alcohol, sexuality, and moral relativism than alumni who had attended/graduated from the seminary in the early 1950s.

⁹³ On the origins of the "new morality," see Doris LeRoy, "Joseph Fletcher: The Secular Priest?" in Christopher Hartney, ed., *Secularisation: New Historical Perspectives* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 99.

for Your Life.⁹⁴ The first version dedicated an entire chapter to the evils of dancing, drinking, smoking, movie-attending, and card-playing. His revised course completely omitted this section, instead relying on general lifestyle guidelines taught in the New Testament, especially Romans 14.⁹⁵ In this passage, the Apostle Paul taught that while legalistic restrictions on diet and other formerly “unclean” things, or mandated participation in Jewish religious festivals, were no longer prescriptive, Christians should not flaunt their liberty before believers who thought certain practices remained unacceptable, since such believers might be persuaded to sin against their own consciences.

The Romans 14 “principle” also underscored a February 1961 *HIS* article, “Worldliness,” by Paul Little, then IVCF’s Director of International Student Ministries.⁹⁶ IVCF had displayed more willingness to challenge fundamentalist legalism since the 1940s. YFC, throughout the Engstrom era, continued to frown upon activities that could supposedly damage one’s evangelistic witness, such as attending a movie theater, a dance, or a roller-skating rink.⁹⁷ *Campus Life*’s debut issue reflected a less rigid attitude. Aping a mainstream, nationally syndicated newspaper column, the debut issue of *Campus Life* printed “Your Complete ‘Dear Abby.’” The column addressed teenagers’ perennial questions about “gambling, drinking, dancing, movies, slacks, bermudas, shorts, short shorts, Sunday car washing, parking, necking, petting,” the protracted list conveying a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward persnickety fundamentalist legalism. Never explicitly condemning any of these practices, the authors directed youth to Romans 14, tying moral standards to love of one’s neighbors, both Christian and unchristian. The authors also approvingly cited Billy Graham’s recent statement in *Decision* magazine that American teenagers’ number one sin was actually

⁹⁴ See ch. 2, 58-59.

⁹⁵ S. Maxwell Coder, *God’s Will for Your Life*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1958), 104-109.

⁹⁶ Paul Little, “Worldliness,” *HIS* (February 1961), 9-11.

⁹⁷ Robert Cook, Confidentially, *YFC*, January 1958; Idem, “What about Dancing,” *YFC*, September 1957; Idem, Confidentially, *YFC*, June 1959.

“wasting time.” Reflecting the influence of consumerism, *Campus Life*’s monthly column for girls gave tips on fashion trends, dieting, and—in a significant departure from fundamentalist standards—cosmetics.⁹⁸

Thus, YFC entered the late 1960s with an entirely new mission. In spring 1965, IVCF appointed a new general director fitted to the times: John Alexander, chair of the geography department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison—a hotbed of student radicalism.⁹⁹ IVCF commemorated its 25th anniversary on the American campus in 1966.¹⁰⁰ In the January *HIS*, Alexander outlined his vision for the ministry, including its evangelistic thrust:

Up until now our challenge in terms of vocation has been mainly to missionary service. This is good and must be continued. In addition, I would like to see the IVCF of the future challenge students to pray about two other strategic vocations: pastor and teacher. There must be a steadily increasing stream of IVCF graduates presenting themselves to the Church for service as shepherds of local churches. Similarly, I hope to see...IVCF alumni going into the teaching profession at all levels (college, high school, grade school) because of the strategic importance of teachers in influencing the thought patterns of students.¹⁰¹

Significantly, the issue’s main editorial was on discerning God’s will. Editor-in-Chief Paul Fromer recounted his own experience in the main editorial, analogizing the Christian’s receipt of guidance to running an automobile: Just as a car could not run without fuel, the Christian could not work properly apart from God.¹⁰² Fromer reconsidered his plans to be a chemist the summer after a missions filmstrip shown at an IVCF summer camp convinced him that God wanted him to attend seminary instead. His point, however, was that all

⁹⁸ John and Bobbie Landgraf, “Your Complete ‘Dear Abbey,’” *Campus Life*, October 1965, 13-15. Charlene Johnson, Letters on Loveliness, *Campus Life*, 1965-67.

⁹⁹ On U-W Madison, see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 154, 278.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew T. Le Peau and Linda Doll, *Heart. Soul. Mind. Strength.: An Anecdotal History of InterVarsity Press, 1947-2007* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 42-43.

¹⁰¹ John Alexander, “Targets,” *HIS*, January 1966, 4.

¹⁰² Paul Fromer “How to Design an Automobile,” Editorial, *HIS*, January 1966.

Christians were made for God's glory and thus must dedicate everything to him, including career decisions. Rather than the ideal destination, the mission field, as Fromer portrayed it, served as a metaphorical medium for receiving one's unique "marching orders" from God. Although such military rhetoric recalled that of the immediate postwar generation, Fromer employed it less literally.

Elsewhere in the anniversary issue, Fife was more direct. In a brief piece he traced IVCF's contemporary stress on missions to the late nineteenth-century Student Volunteer Movement, whose meetings rang "with the vitality of Spirit-filled young men and women who dreamed dreams and longed for God to use them," exuding both "evangelistic fervor and social concern" and taking the gospel "to almost every part of the globe." After the SVM's emphasis "tragically" shifted to social issues and liberal theology, the Student Foreign Missions Fellowship and IVCF merged, strengthening the latter's threefold agenda for evangelism, discipleship, and foreign missions. He concluded pointedly, "IVCF's current enthusiasm for missions is traceable to two influences: 1) the inevitable sacrifice for God's total world that is characteristic of a spiritually vibrant student movement and 2) IVCF's merger with FMF."¹⁰³

As the anniversary issue circulated in January 1966, Fife met with the Urbana '67 planning team. Instead of simply beseeching God to recruit the next student missionary force, as he had done in 1964, he now suggested practical action. According to the planning committee minutes, he addressed the "considerable concern from mission leaders over the shortage of missionary recruits," which was "strange in the light of enormous interest seen in previous missionary conventions." In his interpretation, "There seems to be great missionary interest but only slight missionary commitment. Missionary leaders are apt to explain the lack of recruits on the grounds that young people today are not prepared to pay the price of

¹⁰³ Fife, "Campus Ferment," *HIS*, January 1966, 22.

missionary service.”¹⁰⁴ Fife, however, did not blame the usual scapegoats—American affluence and comfort—for squelching missionary self-denial. Echoing the Latin American Mission’s Fenton, Fife attributed the problem not to a lack of character but clarity, saying:

...many students who sign missionary decision cards are perfectly willing to go, but do not feel called to the field. Many are in a state of great confusion about the nature of the missionary call and the subject of divine guidance. In the last few conventions, we have been strong in dealing with issues of contemporary events, but rather weak in dealing with some missionary basics: such as, What is a missionary call? What is divine guidance? What work does a missionary do?¹⁰⁵

Given IVCF’s and Urbana’s historical origins, his next statement was striking: “In the history of the Student Volunteer Movement conventions, the call to missionary service was reiterated again and again, and it did not seem as if students were expected to have a strong subjective sense of divine missionary calling.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the impressions recorded by the ecumenical student movement’s delegate to Urbana ‘61 were accurate, and an overly subjective, individualized understanding of God’s will had prevented evangelical students from taking action. The irony of Fife’s SVM reference was that in 1966, the missionary program of the National Student Christian Federation was on life support. In fact, its December 1967 quadrennial convention would be its very last. The cause of death was not confusion over the missionary call but rebellion against the American establishment overall. As the next section argues, such sentiments had penetrated the evangelical student movements, as well.

¹⁰⁴ “Urbana 1967: Full Committee Minutes,” January 8, 1966, box 18, Acc 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Revolutionaries for Christ: PLP, the Counterculture, and Missions Backlash

After student demonstrations erupted in September 1964 at the University of California, Berkeley, *HIS* editors dedicated the June 1965 issue, the final one of the academic year, to a thoughtful, sympathetic analysis of the “Berkeley Affair.”¹⁰⁷ More typically, evangelical youth ministries appropriated the language of “revolution” for their own ends. Christianity was the ultimate social revolution the world had ever seen, Jesus the ultimate revolutionary. PLP shared in the zeitgeist. In “Revolutionaries for Christ,” Woods told Urbana ’64 attendees that it was a “much easier thing for us to sit here and consider some place a thousand miles away” while being apathetic about the campus:

How dare we consider the possibility of service abroad if God is not giving us a ministry right where He has placed us, in our own college and our own university?.... Today the great tragedy is this, that so often when it comes to idealism, vision, sacrifice, it is the politically minded student who is putting the Christian student to shame. Are you, am I, a true revolutionary in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? To what extent are we hazarding our all... for the sake of the gospel?¹⁰⁸

Leaders in YFC and CCC echoed Woods. As Eileen Luhr has shown, in 1966 *Campus Life* began employing the language of student activism to call for spiritual revolution, mostly to inspire evangelism, but also to decry America’s fallen, polarized political “system.” In distinguishing secular and Christian forms of activism, YFC leaders summoned students to pledge their allegiance to the sole world-changing revolutionary, Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹ In January 1967, CCC staffers shared a similar, conversion-centered message to students demonstrating at Berkeley, sparking a wider evangelistic campaign and Bright’s 1969 manifesto, *Revolution Now!*¹¹⁰ Student ministries abandoned any pretense that evangelical students were

¹⁰⁷ *HIS*, “The Berkeley Affair,” June 1965.

¹⁰⁸ Woods, “Revolutionaries for Christ,” in *Change, Witness, Triumph*, 199.

¹⁰⁹ Eileen Luhr, “A Revolutionary Mission: Young Evangelicals and the Language of the Sixties,” in Schafer, ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, 69-70.

¹¹⁰ According to John Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 130, CCC

immune to widespread disillusionment with the American establishment.¹¹¹ *Campus Life* introduced a series of forums that honestly discussed Vietnam, secular philosophies, and the seemingly irrelevant American evangelical “subculture.”¹¹²

HIS tackled the revolutions within—and against—American-led foreign missions. “Are Westerners needed?”, a January 1967 piece, tackled the question, “Is the day of the foreign missionary over?” by surveying “the only people who can say,” namely, “Christians in the various national churches around the world.” According to the responses sent to IVCF’s headquarters, national churches welcomed culturally sensitive missionaries bringing specialized professional or linguistic training to the field.¹¹³ A piece reprinted from *Africa Now* reminded students, as violent revolutions swept sub-Saharan Africa, that martyrdom was still a possibility. The issue’s lead article lampooned prevalent apathy and negativity, facetiously recommending “Nine infallible ways to avoid the missionary call” that included avoiding missionary-minded people, attending Urbana only for the momentary excitement, and, if all else failed, either embracing religious pluralism or rejecting Christianity altogether.¹¹⁴

As the year proceeded, the nature of missionary work itself was discussed. In February Fuller Seminary’s Donald McGavran affirmed the priority of proclamation evangelism over social action, in keeping with the statement produced by the April 1966 Wheaton Congress on Evangelism. McGavran pilloried the World Council of Churches’ affinity for vague, secular terms for missions that effectually conflated them with

staffers considered the late 1960s to early 1970s the ministry’s “golden age,” despite campus radicalism and some internal ruptures.

¹¹¹ Isserman and Kazman, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 21-40.

¹¹² “The Campus Life Forum,” *Campus Life*, December 1968.

¹¹³ “Are Westerners Needed?” *HIS*, January 1967, 14-16.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Roundhill, “Nine Infallible Ways to Avoid the Missionary Call,” *HIS*, January 1967, 2-4.

humanitarian work. rather than, in his words, the means “to reconcile men to God in Jesus Christ, to disciple the nations, to bring men to faith and obedience, to baptize men in the Triune name and teach them all things whatsoever He has commanded.”¹¹⁵ In June, Fife plugged Urbana by urging students to acknowledge that the contemporary barriers to foreign service were no longer disease or a months-long journey overseas, thus making it hard to feel like a “hero” for taking a 10-hour flight. Instead, 1960s barriers were more likely to be the time and effort required to obtain an advanced degree in linguistics, to adapt the gospel to television or radio, or to overcome “that terrifying and debilitating barrier, prejudice.” Missionary sacrifice was being reconceived as less physical than mental, an experience akin to joining the Peace Corps.

Aware of the revolutions on campus and in missions, IVCF leaders nevertheless were shocked by Urbana '67, as a faction of students lashed out against the evangelical “establishment.” Some student attendees even denounced the modern missionary movement from the convention floor, calling it a tool for Western, imperialism, paternalism, ethnocentrism and, perhaps most egregiously, religious hypocrisy.¹¹⁶ What could a country beleaguered by racism and violence offer the world? In a panel entitled “My Life to Give,” three speakers addressed why the contemporary student should consider foreign missions—but none gave a soul-shaking defense. The first speaker, David Howard, on leave from the Latin American Mission in Columbia, insisted, “*I disagree wholeheartedly with the idea, which I used to hear proclaimed rather vociferously when I was a student, that the need constitutes the call. If this were true, why am I not a missionary in India?*”¹¹⁷ Instead, Howard attributed missionary motivation to obeying Jesus’s Great Commission. Warren Webster, a veteran missionary to Pakistan, took the floor next, agreeing with Howard that it

¹¹⁵ Donald McGavran, “Wheaton Congress on Evangelism,” *HIS*, February 1967, 24, 27.

¹¹⁶ See Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 41; Hunt and Hunt, 244-45, 252-53.

¹¹⁷ Howard, “Motivation: The Need,” in *God’s Men: From All Nations to All Nations* (Chicago, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 153.

was the Holy Spirit's independent work, not mechanical response to the world's "need," that stimulated lasting evangelistic movements. "The needs of the world are so tremendous that they will crush you," he said. "It is the inner, divine authorization alone which can sustain you."¹¹⁸ Arthur Glasser, then North American director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly, China Inland Mission), concluded the panel by addressing Christ's Second Coming. Significantly, in a year when the Six-Days War between Israel and Palestine stimulated apocalyptic fervor among dispensational premillennialists, Glasser did not urge students to evangelize before Armageddon.¹¹⁹ Omitting any reference to Israel, he referenced the attack on eschatological hope led by radical theologians, assuring students that Christ would, in fact, return to rid the world of evil and that evangelizing every nation would hasten his coming.¹²⁰

In a second, plenary speech, Webster tackled student objections to missionary paternalism in a revolutionary world by referencing the convention theme, "God's Men: From all nations to all nations," to maintain that the "missionary vocation" was still relevant, but no longer Western-dominated. In a later plenary address, Francis Ruth Steele, of the North Africa Mission, gave advice for discerning one's calling to the mission field. On the one hand, he echoed Fife by telling students to stop waiting for a dramatic "missionary call" experience. On the other, he still encouraged students to seek divine guidance, as they would in choosing any vocation, without outlining specific steps. Thus, despite Fife's desire to rid the missionary call of confusion, Steele, Howard, and Webster may have exacerbated it.

Student response to Urbana '67 ranged from outright hostility to general apathy, and decisions for overseas service dropped yet again—to only 387, 4% of 9,200 delegates.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Warren Webster, "Motivation: The Mandate," in *God's Men*, 162-63.

¹¹⁹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 332, 345.

¹²⁰ Arthur Glasser, "Motivation: The Lord's Return," in *God's Men*, 171-75.

¹²¹ "Missionary Decision Card Totals since 1950-51," May 11, 1966, Box 17, "Urbana: Statistics," Acc. 15-21, Intervarsity, BGCA.

Only an additional 7% submitted cards indicating they would seek God's will. Urbana leaders grappled with uncomfortable implications: Was the traditional missionary call lost on the Sixties generation? Was God not working in students' lives? Hoping to diagnose the recruitment problem through hard data, Urbana organizers mailed delegates a comprehensive survey prepared in conjunction with the recently launched Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center and Fuller Seminary's Schools of World Mission and Psychology. The first stated goal was as follows: "To understand the motivations of today's college student and thus more effectively communicate the opportunities for service." Another goal was to help those needing "guidance toward future life work."¹²² Over 400 pages in length, the MARC survey results, published in 1969, helped illuminate why only a handful of decision cards trickled into InterVarsity's offices. Particularly revealing answers dealt with the overall motivation for missions, the reality of hell, and the nature of the missionary call.

First, regarding missionary motivation, in Urbana's early years, the simple need to evangelize unreached people was paramount due to the fate awaiting them otherwise. IVCF's faith statement, updated in 1960, specified belief in the "resurrection of the unredeemed to judgment and everlasting punishment"—but none of the speeches at Urbana '67 stressed this.¹²³ Convention attendees agreed that need factored in but very few selected the phrase, "saving souls from eternal judgment," to best capture the chief aim of missions. Rather, the top two selected motivations for missions were 1) to *reconcile people to God* and 2) to *follow God's commands*—the respective views of Donald McGavran and David Howard.¹²⁴ Second, related to the missionary motivation, attendees' attitudes toward the doctrine of eternal judgment were revealing. Only 37% of attendees concurred that those not

¹²² MARC Survey, box 26, Acc. 15-21, InterVarsity, BGCA.

¹²³ In 1960, Fife helped update the IVCF faith statement to reaffirm traditional doctrines such as hell. See Hunt and Hunt, 193, 374.

¹²⁴ Paul F. Barkman, Edward R. Dayton, and Edward L. Gruman, *Christian Collegians and Foreign Missions* (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communications Center, 1969), 31.

hearing the biblical gospel were eternally lost. Another 25% believed that the unreached would be saved or lost based on the knowledge they possessed. The question's supplementary comment noted that Christian collegians present were not unique in holding this position, instead sharing it with missionary candidates, career missionaries, seminarians, and ministers, thus leading analysts to fault inadequate teaching within the church rather than universalism permeating the general culture.¹²⁵ A related question, "Will there be literal fire in hell?" received a similar response, with less than half agreeing. To be fair, by the mid-1960s, Graham was equivocating about the nature of hell, too.¹²⁶

Third, questions directly addressing the missionary call produced ambiguous results. Respondents were divided, with a slight majority saying the call required no more special leading than another career decision, as opposed to special divine guidance. Fewer than half said that a missionary call required special leading from God, with the majority citing *objective criteria*—including God's biblical commands, a match between one's talents and the world's need, and the opportunity to share in God's global work.¹²⁷ Taken alone, the result suggested that Fife made progress in his goal to revive the "objective" missionary call—until the next survey question, that is.

To the statement, "In my thinking about missions I have reached the following stage," 65% of respondents marked, "I am not sure if God is definitely calling me to be a foreign missionary, but I am willing to go if He directs." The editors' comment read, "Here we have almost 6000 college age men and women who say that they are willing to go if God directs. They are not sure that God wants them to be a foreign missionary. Are they really serious? Are they mistaken about their own intentions? Should we conclude that God does not want them to be foreign missionaries?"¹²⁸ Perhaps the most puzzling survey result was

¹²⁵ Ibid., 28-29.

¹²⁶ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 49-50.

¹²⁷ Barkman, Dayton, and Gruman, *Christian Collegians and Foreign Missions*, 69.

the question, “What do you think is the most important reason there are not enough missionary candidates?” Sixty-eight percent said, “People are not heeding the will of God.”¹²⁹ In sum, the majority of respondents claimed willingness to go while also pointing fingers at their supposedly disobedient peers.

In 1968 InterVarsity Press released *Essays on Guidance*, a compilation of *HIS* pieces on discerning God’s will published from 1944 to 1967. Bayly, who edited the volume, selected for the preface his somewhat critical 1959 editorial on student preoccupation with guidance.¹³⁰ The essays displayed a wide range of views, juxtaposing palpable 1940s missionary concern with relative 1960s lassitude. In 1969 Fife resigned as Missions Department director due to declining health, leaving his replacement, David Howard, and Urbana ’67 co-organizer Paul Little with the task of salvaging student-missionary zeal.¹³¹ That summer Planning Committee members met to discuss the next convention in light of the MARC survey results. According to the minutes, the committee’s prevailing conclusions about the 1967 delegates were, first, that they demonstrated “great confusion over the missionary call and the receipt of divine guidance” and, second, that they were theologically illiterate.¹³² In addition to the MARC survey, the Little-Howard team assessed the feedback sent by missionary heavyweights and IVCF executives. Francis Steele followed his 1967 address with a letter implying that the convention’s massive growth came at the price of superficiality, accommodating not only the “serious Christian” but also the “mixed-up” and “pagan” student. Steele opined that Urbana should focus only on the first category, since the spiritually immature demographics would have “serious hang-ups” discerning “the direction

¹²⁸ Ibid., 70.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁰ Bayly, ed., preface to *Essays on Guidance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968).

¹³¹ Hunt and Hunt, 244.

¹³² MARC Survey Results, box 20, Acc. 15-21, BGCA.

of God for Christian service.” Perhaps this was why his address did not offer specifics for individual guidance—if students were devout, they should clearly see God’s leading.¹³³

In December 1969 the planning committee received a letter from former president Troutman, who observed: “Sometime in the 50s, [Urbana] became a student convention built around the structures of foreign missions,” a development he opined was reminiscent of the SVM’s quadrennial conventions prior to its own missionary decline.¹³⁴ In 1969, the ecumenical student movement’s missions wing voted itself out of existence, following its recent, highly radicalized conventions.¹³⁵ Was IVCF’s doom next? Upon becoming Missions Director in 1969, Howard immersed himself in the student scene, visiting volatile campuses and witnessing protests firsthand. Throughout one of his first staff training weekends, students’ antipathy toward missions was palpable. As he recalled 25 years later, chapter leaders were “clobbering” him, “attacking the whole idea of missions” to Timbuktu when Harlem and Vietnam burned. IVCF’s director John Alexander and Howard had planned the session to remind increasingly apathetic staffers of the organization’s third official purpose, after on-campus evangelism and discipleship—to encourage individual students to determine their roles in world evangelization. Originally allotted one hour, the session lasted all day, as Howard rebutted students’ vociferous objections to missions by asking: “What does that have to do with your response to God’s command in His Scriptures to get the gospel to the rest of the world?”¹³⁶

¹³³ Francis Steele to David Howard, December 6, 1969, box 20, “Criticism: pre-IVMC ’70,” Acc. 15-21, BGCA.

¹³⁴ Charles Troutman to David Howard, December 5, 1969, Box 20, “Criticism: pre-IVMC ’70,” Acc. 15-21, BGCA.

¹³⁵ Process ’67 was the last of the SVM’s Quadrennial Conferences. See the conference report, “Everything that Could Have Happened and This is the Report,” Series IV, box 28, folder 368, University Christian Movement Records, Yale Divinity Archives.

¹³⁶ Howard, interview by Paul Ericksen, May 21, 1993, tape 8, Papers of David M. Howard, BGCA.

Urbana '70: The Death of Student Missions?

Revulsion toward missionary stereotypes prompted leaders, once again, to revise the Decision Card, retitling it “World Evangelism Decision Card.” The 1970 conference program even defended its use, maintaining, contra a cynical generation, that the card was not a “gimmick” but could “serve some very useful purposes in your life,” elaborating, “It can help you face the issues of world evangelism and the part God may wish you to play in the world outreach of His Church. As you pray about what God has been saying to you at Urbana 70, this card may be one means of coming to some specific decisions before God.” The MARC Survey likely prompted the change: Although only 7% of the 1967 convention attendees submitted a Decision Card committing themselves to “seek God’s will” for their lives, 40% of survey respondents said they did just that when asked, “Did you make any life decisions at Urbana?”¹³⁷ Thus, not all seekers were card-signers; perhaps they felt their personal commitment did not need to be regulated by any religious establishment.¹³⁸ In addition to broadly countercultural sentiments, Urbana ’70 organizers dealt with a radical underground newspaper and even bomb threats. Overall, though, the conference marked a positive turning point in American evangelical attention to social concern, thanks largely to inner-city evangelist Tom Skinner. Skinner’s plenary address condemned racism in the U.S. church and received a standing ovation after the concluding line, “Christ the liberator has come,” which was used for the conference compendium’s title.¹³⁹ As Chapter Six will discuss, Skinner represented a growing movement of young evangelicals committed to social justice.

In its March 1971 convention report, *HIS* noted that Skinner’s speech was the most-requested audio recording, followed by “God’s Will for Me in World Evangelism,” by Paul

¹³⁷ Barkman, Dayton, and Gruman, *Christian Collegians and Foreign Missions*, 71.

¹³⁸ This result does seem to portend the anti-institutional, “privatized” spirituality Roof detected in his surveys of adult Baby Boomers. See Roof, *Generation of Seekers*, esp. 194-200.

¹³⁹ Tom Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” in *Christ the Liberator*, ed. John Stott (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 189-209.

Little.¹⁴⁰ Complementing David Howard's opening-night address, an inspirational history of "student power" in overseas missions, Little targeted the primary motivational problem revealed by the MARC survey: student confusion over the missionary call. Rather than any external, objective factor, Little maintained that God's unique, personalized direction determined whether a student should be a stateside professional or overseas missionary—since neither role was inherently superior to the other.¹⁴¹ If Little's goal was to recruit foreign missionaries, then his strategy was curious. His talk not only portrayed missions as one out of innumerable valid vocations, it was free of the traditional urgency to deny oneself for others' sake.

Fromer editorialized, "Perhaps Urbana is best viewed as a Christian life conference in a missions setting." That neither of the two most popular talks were "centrally focused on missions," he surmised, "may explain why few stood for commitment to overseas missionary work (about 200), while unbelievable thousands stood to indicate that God had made them open to do His will, should it lead toward such work."¹⁴² According to unpublished figures in Howard's personal papers, only 197 people—1.6% of the 12,300 delegates—submitted decision cards indicating their intention to serve overseas. Even if thousands stood up at the conference, only 5% of attendees confirmed their commitment to seek guidance by submitting a card. In both relative and absolute terms, the response represented an astonishing drop from the earliest Urbana conferences.¹⁴³ Fromer interpreted the outcome as follows:

Rather than putting the final touches on missionary commitment, as happened in the great student missionary conventions of the 1890's, God may have been establishing the initial Christian life beachhead of the interest and commitment that is the essential prerequisite for such a final commitment later on.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Fromer, "Acid Test," *HIS*, March 1971, 16.

¹⁴¹ Little, "God's Will for Me in World Evangelism," in Stott, 211-227.

¹⁴² Fromer, "Acid Test," 16.

¹⁴³ "Urbana '70 stats," box 2, folder 2, Papers of David M. Howard, BGCA.

This seemed to be a very young convention. The Christians attending did not seem very well-versed in Scripture, doctrine, evangelism or Christian experience generally. Perhaps for such a group the precise issue of missions is a bit further down the pike, certain crucial issues of Christian living having to be settled first (the excellence of Christ's lordship, confidence in Scripture, trust enough in God to risk oneself regarding occupation etc.)¹⁴⁴

Twenty-five years after the 1946 Toronto meeting, Urbana seemed to have fallen short of its founding goals.¹⁴⁵ Although student attendance and program variety swelled throughout the 1950s and 1960s, delegates' quantifiable commitment to overseas missionary careers collapsed. Missionary interest was a mile wide—but an inch deep.

Conclusion

Did the American student-missionary movement die on New Year's Day 1971? Given what had happened among both ecumenical and evangelical students, the prospects appeared grim—even more so only months later, when John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in East Africa, delivered a bombshell keynote speech to the 1971 Milwaukee Missions Festival declaring that the time had come for a "moratorium" on Western-led foreign missions. "The churches of the Third World must be allowed to find their own identity, and...the continuation of the present missionary movement is a hindrance to this selfhood of the church."¹⁴⁶ To his proposal, evangelicals issued a resounding rebuttal at the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, for which, ironically, Gatu served as an official convener.¹⁴⁷ As Chapter Six shows, the evangelical student movements did not completely abandon the foreign-missionary enterprise either. Nevertheless, the 1960s upheaval severed PLP's inherent ties to missionary

¹⁴⁴ Fromer, "Acid Test."

¹⁴⁵ See Howard's reflections on Urbana's nadir in Howard, *Student Power in World Missions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Gerald Anderson, "A Moratorium on Missionaries? *Christian Century* 91, no. 2 (1974): 43–45. See also Robert Reese, "John Gatu and the Moratorium on Missions," *Missiology: An International Review* 42, no. 3 (2014): 245–56.

¹⁴⁷ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 167–68.

self-denial. Leaders adapted by recommending shorter-term and non-professional missionary service and emphasizing university education. During Engstrom's era in YFC, students were taught to discern God's plan for their lives by considering potential cultural *influence* rather than immediate evangelistic *conversions*. In 1965, *mobilizing* American youth *for* Christ's sake lost ground to a new goal: *winning* youth *to* Christ in the first place. Throughout the decade, IVCF pursued an intellectually savvy approach to missions that departed from older, emotional appeals. Fife's stated desire to restore objectivity to the missionary call was not reflected in the Urbana platform. Thus, the burden of finding God's plan for one's life remained as heavy in 1970 as it had been in 1960; unfortunately, the process for discerning it was more ambiguous than ever.

Chapter Six: PLP Meets the “Me Decade”: God’s Plan and the New Ethos of Self-Fulfillment

In October 1972 *Campus Life* reviewed *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, or, “the true confessions of a liberated bird!” The publishing phenomenon, topping the *New York Times* bestseller lists in 1972 and 1973 after its 1970 release, portrayed a seagull who spends his days perfecting the ability to fly rather than finding food. Derided by his parents and the town elders, he cries, “Who is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a higher meaning, a higher purpose in life?” Though *Campus Life*’s reviewer rejected the book’s “basically non-Christian philosophy,” he did not denounce the aspiration for self-improvement, commenting that only Christ could “give life-changing power to men who could not help themselves.”¹ *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* symbolized the 1970s turn to “self,” marked by a bourgeois boom in self-help literature, therapeutic techniques,² and biting commentary by “Me Decade” essayist Tom Wolfe, historian Christopher Lasch, and *TIME* magazine.³ Working-class Americans, of course, still had “rent to pay.”⁴ In 1979, however, pollster Daniel Yankelovich’s nationwide survey revealed that Americans, collectively, had come to prioritize meaning over money in their work. Americans’ historic ethic of self-denial, Yankelovich suggested, had succumbed to self-fulfillment.⁵ *Christianity*

¹ Book Stop, *YFC*, October 1972, 50.

² See Bruce Schulmann, “Plugging In: Seeking and Finding in the Seventies,” in *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2001), 78-101; Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America’s Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ Tom Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and a Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976; Christopher Lasch, *A Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979); “Narcissus Redivivus,” *TIME*, September 20, 1976. The background and reception of Lasch’s manifesto is particularly illuminating. See Eric Miller, *Hope in a Scattering Time: A Life of Christopher Lasch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 220-38.

⁴ Jefferson Cowie, *Staying Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 187.

⁵ Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 1-13.

Today's review of Yankelovich's *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*, concluded, "The Christian community in America, which is becoming increasingly self-centered and me-oriented, could profit from this adroit critic of our times."⁶

Sociological and historical studies have suggested that American evangelicals, particularly Baby Boomers, began to reflect a more therapeutic, culturally accommodating variety of spirituality and practice in the 1970s.⁷ PLP, as this chapter argues, uniquely reflected the zeitgeist, as evangelicals imbibed the idea that for God to accomplish his plans for the world, individuals needed to develop their individual talents, interests, and intellect by trusting their desires and instincts. Evangelicals entered the decade facing a backlash against the American-dominated foreign-missionary movement, thus enervating the call for students willing to endure literal, lifelong sacrifice for objective, evangelistic need. While the dust settled from the 1960s upheaval, leaders of evangelical youth movements responded by promoting missions—which continued to transform—as a path to personal and professional self-development. Meanwhile, an emerging "Evangelical Left" criticized mainstream evangelicals' individualism and lack of social concern but fostered personal self-fulfillment in other ways, particularly in their support for the women's movement. Conservatives, reacting negatively to overt feminism, nevertheless agreed that, through faith in Christ, women could and *should* attain their best and happiest selves. Mass-market paperbacks on decision-making and other personal problems proliferated, offering an evangelical alternative

⁶ Reed Jolley, "A New Ethic of Commitment," Review of *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*, by Daniel Yankelovich, *Christianity Today*, July 16, 1982, 60.

⁷ Sociologists who observed this during or shortly after the 1970s include James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983); Richard Qeubedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Ibid, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978). For later studies, see David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ibid, *A Generation of Seekers* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

to the burgeoning industry of secular self-help. The chapter will conclude by examining the controversy provoked by a popular 1980 title in this genre, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, which revealed the prominence of self in evangelicals' discernment of God's will.

The Goodness of God's Will

In summer 1970, at the annual CCC staff training conference, Bright tested a revised version of the program he had created to help Christians evangelize others, which included instructions on how to explain God's will. Non-believers and "carnal Christians" held damaging misconceptions about God's will, preventing them from seeing it as the "best possible." This prompted them either to reject the gospel or live defeated, fruitless lives. Citing a modernized translation of a familiar PLP text, Proverbs 3:5-6, Bright countered negative perceptions:

In the perfect will of God, you are all that God wants you to be. Nothing is missing. You find yourself doing what you had always, deep down, wanted to do. In the perfect will of God, you soon see that you are 'where the action is.' In His niche for you, you become progressively more like Christ himself. When you yield to His perfect will, God has free rein to do with you as He pleases, and you can be sure that what He does in you and with you will be good.⁸

In locating "the action" in the center of God's will, the teaching echoed *Revolution Now!*, his counterculture-directed presentation of the gospel which deemed the Lordship of Jesus Christ the true ground of spiritual authenticity and world-changing social movements.⁹ Of course, Bright had portrayed God's plan for the individual's life as "wonderful" and fulfilling since the 1950s; here, he adapted the language to a generation seeking more internalized meaning.

Before 1970 finished, CCC's rival organization, IVCF, began promoting a similarly sanguine view of PLP. Paul Little's speech at Urbana, the second most-popular after Tom Skinner's condemnation of racism, prompted the paradigm shift. If given the chance to ask

⁸ Bill Bright, Transferable Concepts, summer 1970 staff training conference. CRUA.

⁹ See ch. 5, 221.

Jesus Christ “one question,” Little began, the “vast majority of you would ask a question related in some way to how you could know God’s will for your life.”¹⁰ Knowing his audience well, he used his speech, “God’s will for me in world evangelism,” to contest prevalent yet distorted perceptions among evangelicals.

Now the tragic, mistaken idea most of us have is that our choice is between doing what we want to do and being happy, and doing what God wants us to do and being miserable. We think that the will of God is some miserable thing which he sort of shoves under our nose and demands, ‘All right! Are you willing, are you willing?’ And suddenly we must decide there and then whether we are going to be miserable for the rest of our lives, whereas, if we could just get out from under his clammy hands, we could really swing.¹¹

Blatantly rejecting the 1940s generation’s stress on “surrendering” one’s will, he told students to quit agonizing and, instead, “affirm the will of God.” God, after all, was not a “celestial scrooge” dragging His children, “kicking and screaming,” to do His will!¹² Not only did his talk portray missions as one of innumerable valid vocations; it also eschewed the traditional urgency to deny oneself for others’ sake. The speech’s publication as an Intervarsity pamphlet and its later repetition at Urbana ’73 demonstrated its resonance. In questioning received evangelical wisdom, Little followed colleague David Howard’s example from Urbana ’67, when Howard “wholeheartedly disagreed” with the view that the world’s evangelistic need constituted the individual call to the mission field, which he recalled being “vociferously proclaimed” in his youth.¹³

Howard’s sister, Elisabeth Elliot, exhibited a similar impulse to “lighten up” in the early seventies. Her 1973 book, *A Slow and Certain Light: Some Thoughts on the Guidance of God*, was highly regarded, with *Campus Life* naming it one of the year’s best.¹⁴ As a

¹⁰ Paul Little, “God’s Will for Me in World Evangelism,” in Stott, 211.

¹¹ Ibid., 215.

¹² Ibid., 217.

¹³ See ch. 5, 229.

¹⁴ “Personal Growth—Mark of Excellence Award,” *Campus Life*, September 1974, 47.

woman, writing without sermonic cadence, Elliot evoked Hannah Whitall Smith's romanticized teaching on guidance in *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (1875).¹⁵ Elliot's publisher, the broadly Baptist Word Books in Waco, Texas, had released lay-oriented, often sentimental works on the Christian life and church renewal since 1965, featuring authors with connections to Mears and southern California, including Richard Halverson, born-again Hollywood celebrities, and the countercultural Jesus People movement.¹⁶ Thus, *A Slow and Certain Light* courted an audience among Sunbelt evangelicals, whose cultural influence was rising.¹⁷

Elliot opened with a disclaimer. "This is a book about the guidance of God, but it is not six easy lessons on how to get it," she said. "It is a collection of observations from personal experience and from the Bible on why and how God does, in fact, guide his children."¹⁸ She drew from her "personal experience" on the Ecuadorean mission field, when husband Jim's 1956 death "required some difficult decisions as to my future work and how I was to accomplish it." Rebuffing any presumptions of ministerial authority, she said she lived "quite a 'normal' suburban life...writing, housekeeping, doing some speaking now and then," and noted that her daughter was in college.¹⁹ "Nothing I have to say here is new. It is a well-worn path that thousands have traveled, but I have written down in very simple terms what I have seen on the way, hoping that one more witness will be an encouragement to some who even in the 1970s believe that there is a God who can lighten our darkness." Aside from the poignant, uplifting tone, her teaching echoed Bright, Little, and Howard in

¹⁵ See ch. 1, 28-29.

¹⁶ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55-59.

¹⁷ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Conservatism, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Elisabeth Elliot, *A Slow and Certain Light: Some Thoughts on the Guidance of God* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, book jacket.

overturning the stern, narrow depictions of God's will that pervaded mid-century evangelicalism. Her major epiphany regarded the role of personal desire in indicating divine leading:

One thing I have feared ever since I first asked God to accomplish his whole will in my life is my own desires. But I have come to see them in a little different light than I used to. For a long time I took the view that whatever I might want to do could not possibly be what God wanted me to do. That seemed unarguable. I am a sinner, my desires are sinful, 'there is no health in us,' and that's that. I went on the Manichean assumption that I am always and necessarily bent on evil, so it ought to be relatively simple matter to figure out that the will of God was whatever I didn't want to do.... A better understanding of Scripture has shown me that even I, chief of miserable offenders that I know myself to be, may now and then actually want what God wants. This is likely to be the case more and more as I practice obedience, but it can also be a very simple and natural thing.²⁰

For scriptural support, she cited Paul's guidance (in 1 Corinthians) to new Christians that if a pagan invited them to dinner, they were free to go, if they *wanted* to.

Regarding major life decisions, Elliot had come to believe that God "needed to meet different people in different ways." Growing up in a "middle-class fundamentalist family," her frame of reference included "the notion that every decision ought to be confirmed by some specific Scripture verse, gotten in some special way. I prayed for this and often received it." Although she conceded it was "possible to find a Scripture verse for anything one wants to do," which meant it could not always be God's guidance, she contrasted this attitude with her own "experience... that of a girl who had set her heart to obey." This had to make a difference, she maintained, since "God makes concessions, if I may call them that, to the thing I think I need, if the request is not a presumptuous one." If God accommodated his guidance to her own perspective, surely he did the same for others.²¹

There are many Christians in the world to whom it would not even occur that God would speak as I thought he did to me, directly. Their frame of reference would include a church and a confessor and spiritual exercises I never heard of. They would expect God to instruct them only through those media. There are those who see visions and dream dreams and listen for the divine call through those. There are

²⁰ Ibid., 99.

²¹ Ibid., 100-101.

some who take the view that they must simply muddle through and hope God will be nice to them.

Whatever our views, they are probably too narrow. Our God is, as J.B. Phillips has said, too small. But the wonderful thing is that God is willing to start there. He can lead us into what the psalmist calls large and even wealthy places.²²

Overall, in continuity with traditional views of PLP, *A Slow and Certain Light* affirmed that following God's will would require denying self, in a spiritual sense, and knowing the Bible. However, in its personalized, experiential depiction of divine guidance, Elliot's widely read text represented an early-seventies evolution in evangelical understandings of God's will—perhaps, of God himself. While this view began to take hold, evangelicals deliberated over God's plan for the American missionary movement.

A Revival in Student Missions

In *The Jesus Generation*, Billy Graham's answer to the counterculture, America's pastor addressed the concerns of disillusioned youth. Regarding vocation, he encouraged college-age Christians to consider the "tremendous need" for Christians to go into "journalism, medicine, psychology, diplomatic service, and even politics," and for Christians to serve internationally, "as our world becomes a global village." Published in the same year that John Gatu called for a "moratorium" on Western missions, Graham responded realistically, "Don't let anyone mislead you—*missionaries are still desperately needed*, though not in the same way they were needed fifty years ago. There is not nearly as much need for pioneer missionaries as there used to be, though that need still exists." Bible translators, teachers, nurses, agriculturists, and technicians were the specific roles "desperately needed on the outposts of the earth," and thus students should "take some action in this direction." which "may be the only way Americans can be missionaries in the

²² Ibid., 102. See J.B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1952).

future.”²³ During the 1970s, CCC and IVCF witnessed a revival of student interest in missionary work—despite its increasingly ambiguous nature.

In June 1972, approximately 80,000 students crowded into the Cotton Bowl Stadium in Dallas, Texas, to learn how they could participate in God’s plan for world evangelization, whether at home or abroad. Campus Crusade’s Explo ’72, a five-day student conference concluding with an all-day contemporary Christian music festival, was a watershed event in postwar evangelicalism. Deemed “Godstock” by *Christianity Today*—a play on the secular 1969 rock festival “Woodstock”—Explo confirmed that the old-time religion had survived America’s socio-political crisis and had adapted to youth culture.²⁴ Although Darren Dochuk has argued that Explo was organized by Republicans to galvanize Southern-evangelical support for conservative politics, as evidenced by Richard Nixon’s supportive message read to delegates, the goals listed on the conference program were decidedly apolitical.²⁵ CCC leadership urged each attendee to pray for “worldwide spiritual awakening,” for “God’s unconditional love and acceptance to envelop us all,” and, ultimately, for “Your own personal commitment to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our generation.”²⁶

Topping the prayer list was the following request: “for God to reveal His perfect will to each EXPLO ’72 delegate.” In that light, the program handed to all delegates included a 1-page summary of the Sound Mind Principle that, on the surface, seemed unchanged from the 1960s.²⁷ In addition to prioritizing evangelistic opportunity in one’s career decisions, Bright still directed his advice to “choice” *male* college graduates and recommended students read the patriarchal Paul Brown Letter. Despite much continuity, the Explo version of the SMP

²³ Billy Graham, *The Jesus Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 173-74.

²⁴ Turner, *Bill Bright*, 1.

²⁵ Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 326-39.

²⁶ Conference program book, Explo ’72, CRUA.

²⁷ See ch. 4, 183.

contained less dogmatic language. First, the chief objective of investing one's time, talent, and money had changed from "introduc[ing] the greatest number of people to Christ"²⁸ to ensuring that the "largest possible number of people are being won and disciplined for Christ."²⁹ In other words, merely convincing individuals to accept the Four Spiritual Laws, without regard for spiritual sincerity and depth, fell short of the mark. Similarly, the advice displayed more realistic expectations for evangelistic effectiveness, assuming no longer that the Christian could determine, without fail, which career path would "ultimately result in the largest number of people finding Christ."³⁰ Christians, rather, should aim to "contribute to winning and discipling men for Christ, thus contributing our maximum potential for helping to fulfill the Great Commission in this generation."³¹ Finally, when it came to discernment, rather than "to find the will of God,"³² Explo attendees were instructed "to experience" it, with the added qualification, "*When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are in the will of God* [emphasis original]."³³ Explo's presentation of God's will stressed the aim of fostering genuine, lasting spirituality in oneself and others—of "making disciples," not simply "getting decisions," as Bright put it in *Christian Life* magazine's special, Explo-themed June 1972 issue.³⁴

Explo's astounding success followed Urbana's tumultuous conventions in 1967 and 1970, rocked by social protest and record-low decisions for overseas missionary service. As

²⁸ "The Sound Mind Principle" (1966), CRUA.

²⁹ "How to Know God's Will (using the Sound Mind Principle)," Explo '72 program book, 20, CRUA.

³⁰ SMP (1966), CRUA.

³¹ "How to Know God's Will," Explo '72 program book, CRUA.

³² SMP (1966), CRUA.

³³ "How to Know God's Will," Explo '72 program book, CRUA.

³⁴ Bill Bright, "Can the Great Commission Be Fulfilled by 1980?" *Christian Life*, June 1972, 35.

an IVCF faculty advisor recalled in 1979, “Jesus freaks and flower children” dominated 1970.³⁵ Howard, who headed Urbana ’73, poured his energy into portraying missions in a positive light. He promoted his chosen theme, “Jesus Christ: Hope of the World,” by stating it was time to move beyond backlash and resume proclaiming the good news to a desperate world. Compared to its predecessors, the convention indeed avoided controversy, prompting *Christianity Today*’s news editor to report, “For IVCF, Urbana ’73 was in a sense a return to the good old days.”³⁶ Yet innovations continued apace.

Personalizing the 14,000 attendees’ experience constituted a major plank of Howard’s renewal strategy, which he executed through 90 specialized workshops and three mainstage student testimonies. Following from these innovations, the convention provided a platform for short-term mission trips, a supremely significant trend that had taken off in the late 1960s.³⁷ Paul Little mentioned such possibilities in his 1970 talk on discerning God’s will, saying, “in this jet age everyone of us as students ought to consider at least a summer abroad in some other culture as part of our “educational” experience—not to speak of our Christian education in terms of [openness to guidance].”³⁸ Urbana ’73 repeatedly highlighted temporary overseas trips and service opportunities. Russell Weatherspoon, an African-American student chapter leader in New York, recounted his short-term trip to Jamaica, encouraging students to “consider the possibility of widening your experiences by going to a foreign culture.” Even visiting a different American context—rural, urban, suburban—could rid one of ignorance, racism, ethnocentrism, and the inability to grasp that “the way you do

³⁵ Eleanor Edman to John Alexander, February 1, 1980, box 290, folder 15, IVCF Records, BGCA.

³⁶ Ed Plowman, “‘A Way I can Help,’” *CT*, January 18, 1974, 43.

³⁷ See the booklet, Short Terms Abroad, *Overseas Short Term Service* (Wheaton, IL: Short Terms Abroad, 1969). Leaders of this 1965-founded parachurch organization suggested the time was right for short-term missions due to technological advances, professional specialization, and increasing cross-cultural interchange between America and the world. In addition, the authors observed 1960s students’ skepticism toward full-time missionaries’ authenticity and a prevalent “see to believe” mentality, which led youth to trust their personal experience as the highest authority.

³⁸ Paul Little, “God’s Will for Me in World Evangelism,” in Stott, 220.

things is not the only way people do them.”³⁹ While the summer sojourner could use the trip to prepare for future overseas service, its immediate aim was personal growth.

Recently-graduated medical student Donald Curry delivered the main summons to short-term engagement in a talk tellingly entitled, “What if I don’t go overseas?” Instead of backpacking around Europe, taking a short-term missions trip allowed evangelical Baby Boomers to join their generation’s spiritual journey.⁴⁰ Fearing that his Christian life would be wrapped up in Western materialism and comfort, Curry had contemplated working in a developing country. “Here I felt the attraction of the unknown. A chance to do something different and unique. A chance to escape the subtle pressures and expectations of our society and live my own life.” He “jumped at the chance” to work for a summer in a rural hospital in India, an opportunity he hoped would help him decide his future. He was eager to learn from a culture thousands of years older than his own. However, after the summer he left India, having found that complacency in his Christian life came just as easily there as in the West. Instead of running away, he realized that he “must be able to answer the question of how to live a stimulating and challenging Christian life within the bounds of our Western culture, as well as the resulting implications for my role in the missionary outreach of the church.” Students, he suggested, should seize similar “stretching” experiences devoid of safety and security. He concluded with the challenge: “Are you willing to take a chance and discover yourself and your Lord?” The order was telling: Discover yourself first, and then your Lord.

Both Explo ’72 and Urbana ’73 eased the process of discovering one’s self and one’s future amid thousands of options. Bright and Howard both partnered with InterCristo, an organization which used computer technology to match individuals with mission

³⁹ Russell Weatherspoon, “Where do we go from here?” in *Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World: The Urbana ’73 Compendium*, ed. David Howard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 163.

⁴⁰ Roof, *Generation of Seekers*, 79, and Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 4, identify the “journey” as a central image for Baby Boomer spirituality.

opportunities. After conference attendees completed a personal profile indicating their interests and abilities from a standardized list, an InterCristo representative fed the card into a computer, which in turn printed at least ten corresponding overseas service opportunities—many of them shorter-term. The delegate then followed their results around the organizational fair to find their future. According to Howard, the idea was an “overwhelming success,” despite his initial concern that anti-establishment Urbanians would balk at being part of a machine. In fact, InterCristo “personalized, rather than depersonalized Urbana.”⁴¹ The innovation helped students answer the all-consuming question of where God wanted them, as individuals, to go—which Paul Little tackled in a speech reiterating much of his 1970 call to affirm the goodness of God’s will. In the 1973 rendition, however, Little taught that God conformed not only one’s will but one’s very *desires*, to His. This meant, he explained, “Love God, and do what you please.”⁴² The phrase, originating with Augustine, seemed to take on new life in the “do your own thing” era.

The Evangelical Left

The Urbana ’73 program balanced attention to individuality with talks on social justice and the West’s post-colonial role in missions. The opening plenary speech, “Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe,” was delivered by Samuel Escobar, a leader in the Peruvian student movement who in 1972 had been appointed General Director of Canadian InterVarsity.⁴³ The Columbian Gregorio Landero, head of *Accion Unida*, addressed

⁴¹ Howard, interview by Paul Ericksen, May 21, 1993, tape 8, Papers of David M. Howard, BGCA.

⁴² Paul Little, “Jesus Christ: Lord of my life,” in *Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World*, ed. Howard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 69-88.

⁴³ Samuel J. Escobar, “Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe,” in Howard, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 17-31. See also Stanley, *Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 159.

“Evangelism and Social Concern” in his keynote. Urbana ’73 thus addressed concerns raised by the emerging “Evangelical Left,” or “Progressive Evangelicals.”⁴⁴

Only a month prior, Evangelical Left pioneers commanded mainstream evangelicals’ attention by hosting the Thanksgiving Day workshop in Chicago. The resulting Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern apologized for American evangelicals’ complicity in racism, economic injustice, and militarism.⁴⁵ Evangelical leaders’ growing concern for social justice underscored their view of God’s will for the individual, as displayed by literature in the wider movement. *The Other Side*, edited by an evangelical philosophy professor, printed a 1973 article on vocation entitled “Working for God.” At first, the author’s advice was typical for evangelical PLP, recommending that Christians consider, “Am I doing God’s will? Is this really where God wants me? How did I decide to take this work? If this is not where God wants me, what are the alternatives?” Then he took a radical turn:

Jesus may ask some of us to give up our present type of employment. This is especially true for those of us who work in jobs that support, participate in, or perpetuate such things as the occult, alcohol and tobacco production, or the building of instruments of war. If your present work opposes the work of God, if your present job leads man in a negative or immoral direction, then the Spirit has already decided what you should do. Other jobs that are questionable are those which produce or promote such luxury items as jewelry, fancy clothing, or other items that clearly go beyond the basic needs of man for food, clothing, and shelter.⁴⁶

Without any qualification, these stipulations eliminated hundreds of options in retail and hospitality—huge drivers of America’s consumer economy—as well as engineering or manufacturing fields benefitting U.S. defense. In addition, Christian community was vital to the job-hunter’s ethical deliberations. “Christ does not intend that we each in our own

⁴⁴ See David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), and Brantley Gassaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ Evangelicals for Social Action, “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” (1973) <http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about-esa/history/chicago-declaration-of-evangelical-social-concern/> (Accessed November 5, 2017).

⁴⁶ Wesley Mast, “Working for God,” *The Other Side*, May/June 1973, 26-29.

private, personal way decide what is His will,” the author maintained. “He asks rather that members of the whole church be accountable to one another in terms of their work.” Far from being “dispensable,” the Christian “brotherhood *is* the means for deciding, for binding and loosing (Matthew 18).” He concluded with an ultimatum: “The pagan mediums (corporations, universities, banks) are *not* the final court of appeal. Choose this day whom you will serve: the goals of mammon and war and ego or the Father of Abraham and Jesus.”⁴⁷ In his taxonomy, few vocations were untainted by “pagan” influences.

Another socially conscious take on God’s will came from African-American evangelical leader Tom Skinner, the evangelist to inner-city youth who had spoken at Urbana ’70. In a 1970s booklet, Skinner related God’s will to recent socio-political crises such as Watergate and the Civil Rights Movement. Drawing upon Romans 8:28-29, he argued that God’s plan to work all things together for the good of believers mandated fellowship with their Christian brotherhood. This, he clarified, was not to be mistaken for either a secular brotherhood fighting for social justice *or* the established church:

It never occurred to us that it’s not the will of God to build a powerful institution called the church, but to build a powerful community of brothers and sisters committed to Jesus Christ, living out His life on earth, smashing with justice all war and hate and bigotry, wiping out hunger and poverty and letting the world know that Christ is alive. That is the will of God.⁴⁸

The title of Skinner’s landmark 1974 book, *If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions?* overturned platitudinous responses to social problems oftenheard in evangelical circles. The first chapter was dedicated to “the will of God.”⁴⁹

The relationship between social action and evangelism animated missionary debates throughout the decade. Between Urbana ’73 and ’76, the overall missionary movement

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Tom Skinner, *The Will of God* (New York: Tom Skinner Associates, Inc., n.d.), 9.

⁴⁹ Skinner, “The Will of God,” in *If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 15-26.

received a boost from the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. Known thereafter simply as the Lausanne Congress, the event was the largest, most internationally diverse gathering of evangelical leaders ever held. Major outcomes of the congress relevant to PLP include the following: First, delegates affirmed that social action and evangelism were, in British evangelical statesman John Stott's phrasing, "two wings of the same bird."⁵⁰ Second, Fuller Seminary missiologists introduced the concepts of Unreached People Groups and the Homogenous Unit Principle, which shifted missionary paradigms away from the evangelization of nation-states to the development of a distinct church for every cultural-linguistic-ethnic group. Third, the congress recognized that missions was the task of the global, not solely American, church. Hastened by Lausanne, "cross-cultural evangelism" began supplanting "foreign missions." Urbana '76 mediated this and other innovations to students by featuring four plenary speakers from the Majority World, including Ugandan Anglican bishop Festo Kivengere and the Argentinian evangelist Luis Palau.⁵¹ In the address, "Qualifications for Declaring His Glory," the Filipino evangelical leader Isabelo Magalit applauded the Lausanne Covenant for calling Christians to "develop a simple life-style...and to empty ourselves of all but [our] personal authenticity in order to become the servant of others," purportedly alluding to the gospel's conflation with American culture.⁵²

A speech by Lemuel S. Tucker (not the famed African-American journalist), a former IVCF chapter leader studying at Westminster Theological Seminary, demonstrated the compatibility between American youth culture post-1970 and missionary attitudes post-Lausanne. The contemporary university campus was rife with eastern spirituality and

⁵⁰ J.D. Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers, and Responses*. (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975).

⁵¹ David Howard, ed., preface to *Declare His Glory Among the Nations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 7-9.

⁵² Isabelo Magalit, "Qualifications for Declaring His Glory," in *Declare His Glory*, ed. Howard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 197-98.

psychological research, “what TIME magazine has called the new narcissism,” Tucker said. “People are turning inward. No longer is there student power, like that of the [19]60s; the search is now for *inside* power.” Despite enjoying “unprecedented wealth and education,” American students were “perplexed, disconcerted and looking for a way out,” he observed. “Or should I say looking for a way in?”⁵³ Referencing Lausanne, he affirmed that unevangelized nations were not synonymous with “geopolitical” entities, but instead comprised “all the distinct groups of non-Christians, all the homogenous social units of unbelief.” Thus, “the college campus, the island community that it is” and its groups of “non-Christians, all the sororities, all the fraternities, all the athletic teams, the blacks, the social cliques, the whites, the international students, the down-and-outs, the up-and-ins” were to be viewed as nations. If university students failed to fulfill their “mission on the campus,” then there was “little use” in heading to Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Repeating a counterculture mantra, Tucker said, “bloom where you are planted.”⁵⁴ By fulfilling their mission to their own people group, students would realize their personal potential.

Urbana '76 surpassed the 1973 convention's success. Howard again focused on personalizing the delegate experience, choosing another positive theme--“Declare His Glory Among the Nations”—and stacking the daily program with over 100 specialized workshops. Student response revealed a major turnaround from the convention's 1970 nadir: not only did the record-breaking sign-ups force registration to end early, but over 8,500 of the 17,000 attendees submitted World Evangelism Decision Cards indicating their “willingness to go wherever God might choose to send them.” Convention reports did not clarify, however, the proportion of card signers intending to go overseas.⁵⁵ Howard interpreted what since has

⁵³ Lemuel Tucker, “Declare His Glory on the Campus,” in *Declare His Glory*, ed. Howard, 171-72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁵ Howard, ed., *Declare His Glory*, 9.

been called the “Urbana Reversal” as proof that post-sixties students were heeding the Bible’s authority, including its commands to evangelize.⁵⁶

Urbana ’73 and ’76 were notable for more than enthusiastic student response, social action, and non-Western participation. Compared to Urbana ’67, which bore the title, “God’s Men,” 1970s Urbana also recognized women’s central place in missions. Following a banner year for feminism, at Urbana ’73 a woman delivered an evening plenary address for the first time.

God’s Plan for Women

The 1973 Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern addressed gender inequality as follows: “We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.” In truth, the Chicago Call organizers had invited few women to the conference and dedicated minimal attention to gender issues (reminiscent of the secular New Left’s early 1960s culture).⁵⁷ By the mid-seventies, few Americans, evangelicals included, could ignore the women’s movement—possibly *the* most significant, far-reaching social shift of the decade.⁵⁸ The movement gathered strength in the 1960s—thanks to Friedan’s 1963 *Feminine Mystique*, the 1964 Equal Opportunities Employment Act, and the 1966 founding of the National Organization of Women. More victories came in the early seventies,

⁵⁶ Howard, *Student Power in World Missions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 125-27. His claim that students wanted a return to authority shared affinities with other analyses of 1970s religions and later histories of fundamentalism. For example, Steven Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), profiles a separatist, authoritarian Christian group to portray one route of coping with the volatile decade. On the “Urbana reversal,” see Ralph Winter, “The Student Volunteers of 1886, Their Heirs, and the Year 2000,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 2, no. 2 (April 1985): 176-77.

⁵⁷ Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chs. 1-2. See also Swartz, 186-88.

⁵⁸ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28. Robert Daniels, *The Fourth Revolution: Transformations in American Society from the Sixties to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2006), 119.

including the 1972 Title IX act barring educational discrimination, the Equal Rights Amendment's passage to the states for ratification (although it failed years later), and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision granting women nearly unfettered access to abortion.⁵⁹ Before abortion became central, in the 1970s neo-evangelicals expressed far more concern about secular feminism's attack on traditional gender roles within the Christian family and church.

The evangelical student ministries could not answer the "woman question" so easily. After all, IVCF, YFC, and CCC expected most of their female constituents to obtain a university degree (or higher) and become productive, influential citizens and Christians. In 1964, for example, *Youth for Christ* featured a "Girl's guide to the wonderful world of work," contributed by a Christian vocational counselor who encouraged young women to recognize their God-given talents and to use them in the marketplace. More pointedly, in 1967 *HIS* printed an unsigned essay on the plight of 20-something, single, evangelical women which seemed to sympathize with feminist critiques. "Why the big push toward early marriage, anyway? Can't happiness be found outside of marriage?" the editorial protested. "Any reader of *The Feminine Mystique* has been forcefully reminded of the stress society places on marriage and family." Given the prominence of feminist discussion and demonstration on the secular campus at the time, it should not be surprising that the founders of the Evangelical Women's Caucus held bachelor's and, often, graduate degrees from prestigious universities. Letha Scanzoni received her BA from Indiana University in 1972, while Nancy Hardesty held a master's in journalism from Northwestern University and a PhD in church history from the University of Chicago. Virginia Mollenkott held a PhD from

⁵⁹ Schulmann, *The Seventies*, 160-76.

NYU. Like the rest of the Evangelical Left, evangelical feminists hailed from the elite knowledge class.⁶⁰

Another crucial, albeit underrecognized, signifier of changing attitudes toward women in 1973 occurred between Christmas and New Year's Eve at Urbana, when Elisabeth Elliot became the first woman to deliver an evening plenary address. Lauded by postwar evangelicalism as an exemplar of missionary sacrifice, Elliot had continued her husband's evangelistic outreach to indigenous Ecuadoreans. 1973 brought further tragedy when her second husband, seminary professor Addison Leitch, died. During the seventies, however, she advocated for another type of self-denial: women's submission to traditional gender roles. Although her Urbana speech included some digs at secular feminism, a reactionary conservatism was far from the central message, which exuded the positive, inspiring tone pervading both the convention and the just-published *A Slow and Certain Light*.⁶¹

"Today," she said, "strident female voices are raised shrilly and ad nauseam to remind us that women are equal to men—but such a question has never even arisen in the history of Christian missions." For years women constituted the majority of foreign missionaries, she noted, before providing historical examples. Nevertheless, all women, but particularly wives and mothers, were called to certain kinds of submission. Alluding to women in the Bible who performed menial, domestic tasks to serve Jesus, she sternly asked, "For those of you women who HATE that kind of work, would you do it for Him?" Countless women had "done what God has sent them to do...without the tub-thumping of modern, egalitarian movements," she said. "They had a place, and they knew they had it, because the Scriptures say they have." She affirmed that both men and women, made in God's image, equally shared in the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit but were assigned

⁶⁰ Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 157-58. Hunter, "Young Evangelicals and the New Class," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 2 (Dec. 1980): 155-69.

⁶¹ Elliot, "The Place of Women in Missions," in *Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World*, ed. Howard, 123-30 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974).

“diversities of operation.” There was “nothing interchangeable about the sexes” and “nothing interchangeable about Christians.”⁶²

Despite maintaining that the Bible clearly outlined her “obligations in church and home,” her personal experience demonstrated that the “sphere” of those obligations had “certainly varied.” Jim’s death in Ecuador, she admitted, placed her in some “indefinable positions.” She and her female colleagues were presented with an open door to evangelize the men who killed her husband, and yet at the time she did not think it was a woman’s job. “But God’s categories are not always ours,” she conceded. “I had to shuffle my own categories many times.” Living as a widow in the U.S., she discovered a new “sphere of obligations” from those of a housewife. At all times, regardless of her marital status, she was called to be a “witness”—the word she said she preferred to “missionary.” This was significant, given the historically masculine connotations “missionary” carried. (In the past, the term had only been applied to the male minister travelling overseas and not the other members of his “mission family.”⁶³) The “same Lord who calls me by name,” she said, reminds “us all in a still, small voice, ‘Ye are my witnesses.’” The Lord of the universe “calls you—you men, you women—and offers you a place in His program,” and no one should doubt that “the Lord of your Life has his own way of getting through to you to know the specifics of His will.” Every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, if they had “seen” his work, if they had, in her closing words, “felt the wind that is the trumpet of liberty

⁶² Ibid., 124-26.

⁶³ Eileen F. Moffett, “Betsey Stockton: Pioneer American Missionary,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 19, no. 2 (April 1995): 73. In 1822 Betsey Stockton, an African-American slave, became the U.S.’s first unmarried female to head overseas as a missionary. See also Dana L. Robert, “Evangelist or Homemaker? Mission Strategies of Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Wives in Burma and Hawaii,” in *North American Foreign Missions, 1800-1914*, ed. William R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 116-32.

blow over the land of the living.” While vague, her benediction undoubtedly resonated with the quest for personal freedom animating 1973. Elliot received a standing ovation.⁶⁴

IVCF’s educated, female constituency provided fertile ground for evangelical feminism in the 1970s.⁶⁵ Even Elliot, conservative rhetoric aside, detached missions from a specific profession and tied it instead to personal identity, an empowering shift from doing to being. As she and subsequent female Urbana speakers continually highlighted the equality and freedom missionary work offered women, their claims were justified by the ever-expanding variety of occupations for professional and non-professional missionaries. Newly independent nations resistant to Western proselytizing nevertheless welcomed doctors, teachers, linguists—roles women could fill as “witnesses” rather than professional missionaries. Even though Elliot maintained that Christian wives’ and mothers’ obligations were to the home, it is important to note that most of her audience were unmarried university students not yet encumbered with domestic duties, and she did not exhort the single girls to focus on finding a husband. Moreover, her own life seemed a bit inconsistent with her rhetoric against feminists: after boldly assuming traditionally male roles on the mission field, she had established a successful writing and speaking career. Preaching submission, she embodied freedom.

Although evangelical feminism garnered some press in 1973, the movement took off in 1974, when Word Books published *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation*, co-authored by freelance writer Letha Scanzoni and former associate editor of *Eternity* Nancy Hardesty.⁶⁶ According to Scanzoni’s preface, a female friend, who happened to be an unmarried missionary visiting while on furlough, urged her to write a book on contemporary women’s roles that also spoke to the issue of singleness. *All We’re*

⁶⁴ Elliot, “The Place of Women in Missions,” 127-30.

⁶⁵ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 14, 34.

⁶⁶ Cochran, 25.

Meant to Be insisted that all women were required to exercise the gifts God, through the Holy Spirit, had given them. Virtually bereft of typical PLP language, the book did not detail *how* the individual should discern God's will but reframed the issue: Whether through a secular career or even preaching, Christian women had a right "to be persons, free to give the world all that our individual talents, minds, and personalities have to offer."⁶⁷ *Christianity Today* printed a favorable review of *All We're Meant To Be*, and *Eternity* magazine named it the book of the year for 1975. While Scanzoni and Hardesty received accolades for their groundbreaking work, Fuller Seminary New Testament scholar Paul Jewett elicited more controversy. In *Man as Male and Female*, Jewett argued that the church's commitment to traditional gender roles arose not from biblical misinterpretation but from a correct reading of errant, outdated teaching shaped by Paul's cultural background and rabbinical training. Although the issue of gender roles embroiled seminaries and denominations for the next decade, on a popular level, traditionalist and egalitarian evangelicals seemed to agree on a key point: God's will for women included self-fulfillment. Conservatives continued to champion traditional gender roles but, taking cues from popular, consumer culture, encouraged women, especially wives, to be attractive, stylish, and interesting.⁶⁸

Elliot's *Let Me Be a Woman*, first released by Tyndale in 1976, received its fourth printing in November 1977. The subtitle, "Thoughts on Womanhood for Valerie," captured the author's unique gift for veiling controversial opinions in sweetly personal reflections. God's will for married women entailed "subordination" and "submission" to one's husband, she asserted.⁶⁹ However, the practical outworking of this was unclear, given her portrait of

⁶⁷ Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), 202-209.

⁶⁸ A prime example of this approach was Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1973). Watt, *Transforming Faith*, chs. 5-6, on evangelicals' responses to the women's movement.

⁶⁹ Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes on Womanhood for Valerie* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 142-47.

submission as a general attitude, driven by love and respect, rather than a legalistic set of domestic duties. Submission, furthermore, did not completely bar a wife from maintaining a career. “Perhaps, in the plan of God, she does not actually lay down this career. She continues to do the work to which she was first called,” which she believed was the case for both her missionary and writing vocations: “I was not released from that job in order to become a wife, although it was clear to me that my primary vocation was marriage,” she claimed.⁷⁰

After Elliot broke ground at Urbana ’73, she delivered a follow-up address in 1976, and additional women took the stage. Elliot spoke on the “glory of God’s will,” evoking Little’s upbeat treatment of PLP in 1970. Christians should seek and follow God’s will enthusiastically, exhibiting “absolute trust” in God, the “will to do His will,” and, above all, “joy.”⁷¹ She recounted her five-year courtship with Jim, while both were serving in different mission fields, illustrating God’s sovereignty over romantic love. “Even your desires can be sanctified and used for God’s purposes,” she said, reiterating a point she had made in *A Slow and Certain Light* (rereleased that year). Ultimately, the “will of God was love.”

In the 1976 memoir, *For Such a Time as This*, Vonette Bright admitted to experiencing a total lack of fulfillment during her first years as a housewife, as she spent most of her days attending to Henrietta Mears’s palatial home, where she and Bill lived.⁷² Her solution, which Bill finally approved, was to dust off her degree in secondary education and develop training materials for Crusade staff. The book title carried two meanings: First, it affirmed women’s significance to the kingdom of God, as seen in the biblical story of Esther, one of Mears’s favorites. Second, as the book’s concluding pages revealed, it

⁷⁰ Ibid., 112-13.

⁷¹ Elliot, “The Glory of God’s Will,” in *Declare His Glory*, ed. Howard, 129-40.

⁷² Vonette Bright, *For Such a Time as This* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 27-30.

summoned fellow evangelicals to consider what God wanted them to do to protect righteousness from cultural decline. Bright placed the gospel of God's plan at the forefront but translated it into the language and culture of women's liberation. She said:

Many times the career woman is looking for fulfillment in making a name for herself and excelling over those with whom she is working. But as many women who have made it to the top know, there still is that lack of heartfelt satisfaction. Don't misunderstand. There is nothing wrong with material possessions. There is nothing wrong with desiring position or achievement in life. But these temporal goals for which we strive bring only temporary fulfillment and happiness. We are like children with a short attention span, who play with a toy for a while, but soon leave it for something else.

Somehow this doesn't fit in with the fact that God has promised us a full and meaningful life—yes, an abundant, purposeful life, God wishes for us to be content as individuals—fulfilled as women, wives, and mothers. In John 10.10 Jesus promised, "...I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly"—that life might be full and meaningful.⁷³

One of the more shocking applications came in the chapter, "Hardly an Accident," which taught that divine providence was intimately personalized but that God still gave women "the free will to determine what we are going to do." Consequently, she asserted, "there is no set role for women, no pattern given scripturally to which all women must conform," citing examples of female "prophetesses," "rulers," and "outstanding businesswomen" in the Old and New Testaments. "God has not confined women, so why should we as Christians limit women in what they do?"⁷⁴

Echoing Elliot, she said that a key "consideration in determining God's involvement outside the home is your own desire," citing for support Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart."⁷⁵ Ultimately, Vonette found her answer to the dissatisfaction depicted in the *Feminine Mystique* through a simple confidence that she was doing God's will. "Because I know I am doing exactly what God wants me to

⁷³ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 67-68.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 78.

do, I can experience great satisfaction and joy.”⁷⁶ Spearheaded by Vonette Bright, in the 1970s women began to assume more leadership roles in CCC.⁷⁷

While CCC staffers evangelized the masses, Vonette focused on reaching women. In the last paragraphs of her memoir, she connected women’s individual self-fulfillment to the good of American society:

With all the needs I see in the lives of individuals, as well as in our communities and the nation, I have come to the conclusion that God doesn’t give the Christian the alternative of being bored and unfulfilled. A fulfilled life does not come from sitting back and expecting it to come to you. On the contrary, we are to actively pursue it. The person who can apply his faith to significant action is the one who will understand fulfillment.

This statement exemplifies the way that evangelical PLP both reflected and diverged from the widespread narcissism cultural commentators observed. Far from endorsing self-centeredness, it nevertheless said that exerting one’s full potential, and applying private faith to public concerns, was the only way to achieve social improvement. In typical evangelical fashion, she attributed her own fulfillment to “a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Christ, she said, gave her the “strength, direction, and courage to try to be the kind of woman who [can] make a vital contribution,” continuing, “But this response is not only for me to make. It is available to all women today. All we have to do is to decide that we want to apply our faith to become God’s maximum women FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS [emphasis original].”⁷⁸

As the evangelical student ministries increasingly imbibed popular culture, the practical application of traditional gender roles evolved, especially when it came to unmarried women, the majority of their female constituents. During the seventies single Christian girls faced—and surely contributed to—a major social shift: delayed marriage. In

⁷⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷⁷ Turner, 156-57.

⁷⁸ Bright, *For Such a Time as This*, 122.

1960 the median age of first marriage began a decades-long rise, as did the percentage of never-married women.⁷⁹ Although the sexual revolution was partly responsible, two other factors were likely more influential upon young evangelicals. First, more women put off marrying to finish their education and start a career. Second, as more women entered the workforce, many achieved financial independence.⁸⁰ Starting in 1979 female university enrollment outpaced male, and by the early 1980s women earned the majority of bachelor's degrees.⁸¹ Such progress came with a price: the loss of traditional expectations for the future. For evangelical women, who already tended to outnumber their male counterparts at church, the pursuit of education and career seemed to complicate the question of whether God's will for them included marriage at all, as conveyed by the mid-seventies proliferation of articles on singleness and dating in student periodicals.⁸²

PLP and Self-Help Literature

The women's movement contributed to a growing market: self-help literature. In her authoritative study of this genre, sociologist and literary analyst Micki McGee has argued that American "obsession" with self-improvement can be traced to colonial times. Yet in the 1970s, three social shifts fundamentally transformed self-help culture: women's entry into the workforce, the blurring of the boundary between public and private selves, and mass corporate downsizing.⁸³ Without question, the onset of post-industrialism and economic

⁷⁹ United States Census Bureau, "Estimated Median Age of First Marriage, by Sex, 1890 to the Present," Table MS-2, Historical Marital Status Tables, November 2017. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html> (accessed Jan 18, 2018).

⁸⁰ Daniels, *The Fourth Revolution*, shows that minority women's socio-economic status declined in the seventies, in contrast to white, middle-class women.

⁸¹ See Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Higher Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 65, 66, 68.

⁸² See, for example, "What if I don't get married?" *Campus Life*, February 1970, 17. The editors commented, "Reader response the first time we printed this article was so great you don't dare miss it this time around."

turmoil halted American workers' career advancement and prosperity. 1971 marked the first year the U.S. posted a trade deficit, importing more goods than exporting. Shortly thereafter, the 1973 oil crisis arrested postwar growth and commenced stubborn stagflation.⁸⁴

Consequently, as McGee has proposed:

The tension between the near impossibility of working in a particular calling or vocation across the course of a lifetime and the ideology that finding one's particular calling is central to achieving...happiness is mitigated in two ways: first, an increased emphasis on working on the self, and second, the ideal that one ought to pursue work one loves irrespective of compensation.⁸⁵

Starting in the 1970s, Americans prioritized the pursuit of "self-actualization in work—both work on the self and in the labor force."⁸⁶

Did evangelicals imbibe the impulse to work on the self and the new conviction that one ought to pursue work one loves irrespective of compensation? Regarding self-improvement, James Davison Hunter's study of popular evangelical publishing circa 1980 indeed demonstrated born-again believers' demand for "therapeutic" manuals for attaining better marriage, sex life, mental health, child-rearing, and weight loss.⁸⁷ As for vocational pursuits, evangelicals studied in this thesis historically did not prioritize making money over accomplishing God's will. The most important "instrumental" rewards for work were to save souls then to provide for one's family. But what happens when a lifelong career in ministry or a stable profession can no longer be assumed? Finding God's sovereign plan for one's life became more important, and, as with their fellow Americans, evangelicals balanced the world's present yet ever-changing needs with their own desires and interests.

⁸³ McGee, *Self Help, Inc.*, 23-46.

⁸⁴ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14; Schulmann, 49, 129-43.

⁸⁵ McGee, 39.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hunter, "Subjectivization and the New Evangelical Theodicy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, No. 1 (1982): 39-47.

The following survey of mass-market books on God's will published in the 1970s illustrates these trends.

Mass-market paperbacks on discerning God's will poured forth from major evangelical publishers and appeared in the rapidly proliferating Christian bookstores across the nation.⁸⁸ To maintain consistency with the thesis overall, the focus is on publishers and authors directly connected to the neo-evangelical world represented by the NAE, Billy Graham, and evangelical seminaries. Such publishers included Tyndale, Baker, Moody, Zondervan, Word, Gospel/Light, IVP, F/H Revell, and Victor Books. A late-1970s re-release of Max Coder's 1946 *God's Will for Your Life* included an updated reading list recommending the following PLP titles published between 1970 and 1976: J. Sidlow Baxter, *Does God Still Guide* (Zondervan, 1971), Dwight Carlson, *Living God's Will* (Revell, 1976), Elisabeth Elliot, *A Slow and Certain Light* (Word Books, 1976), J. Grant Howard, Jr., *Knowing God's Will—and doing it* (Zondervan, 1976), Paul Little—*Affirming the Will of God* (IVP, 1976), Alan Redpath—*Getting to know the will of God* (IVP, 1976), Michael R. Tucker, *Live Confidently—How to Know God's Will* (Tyndale, 1975), and Leslie Weatherhead—*The Will of God* (Abingdon, 1976).⁸⁹ Evangelical publishers reissued mid-century texts (Weatherhead and Redpath, for example) and older Higher Life classics on guidance. The volume of texts, as well as their marketing, conveyed the demand for guidance in uncertain times.

Christian Life magazine's June 1972 issue, dedicated to Explo, featured advertisements for books released by magazine editor Robert Walker's Creation House, founded in 1970. One title, *God Has a Plan for You*, was the autobiography of Walker's

⁸⁸ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 246, notes that between 1965 and 1975 the number of Christian bookstores in America doubled.

⁸⁹ Max Coder, *God's Will for Your Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970s edition, n.d.), 174.

former boss, industrialist and philanthropist Herbert J. Taylor,⁹⁰ who “early discovered God’s plan for his life and followed it despite temporary setbacks and disappointments.” The blurb promised, “Here is a unique self-help book offering proof that it works! Mr. Taylor presents guidelines and challenges each reader to seek God’s plan for his own life. Be true to yourself. God has given you certain talents. When you recognize what has been given you, you will know what you can give the world, and you will know the path to true happiness.”⁹¹

Alongside twentieth-century success stories, many PLP texts derived “how-to” lessons from Bible characters. A prime example was a book released by Mears’s Gospel Light publishers in 1977, entitled *A Journey with Jonah to find God’s Will for You*. The author, a graduate of the NAE-affiliated Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, referenced Mears’s interpretation of Jonah—as a symbol of Israel—in *What the Bible is All About* but applied the story more individualistically.⁹² The book cover promised:

You *can* find God’s will and this book shows you how to do it as you enjoy the ‘greatest fish story of all time.’ In this easy-to-follow yet thoroughly biblical study, author James D. Devine shows how Jonah’s adventures have many parallels to your own life. You will identify as Jonah struggles, gropes and even agonizes over finding God’s will for his life. Jonah not only found God’s will for his life; he also discovered new insights on many spiritual truths. You can too!

Specifically, readers would discover that the will of God was not “necessarily hard, distasteful, or miserable” but “gracious, pure and exciting,” a path to “personal satisfaction and joy!”⁹³

In addition to borrowing some of the marketing tropes of secular self-help literature, 1970s American-evangelical PLP texts surveyed here exhibited the following three themes:

⁹⁰ See ch. 1, 46-47.

⁹¹ “Creation House: publishing the word in a new age,” *Christian Life*, June 1972, 73.

⁹² James J. Devine, *A Journey with Jonah to find God’s will for you* (Ventura, CA: G/L Publishers, 1977), 11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, back cover.

First, they touted PLP as the answer a restless generation was looking for in, as Yankelovich put it, “a world turned upside down.” Second, they typically did not emphasize missionary service over domestic professions. Third, they advised readers to conflate the potential to fulfill themselves and their personal desires with God’s will.

First, evangelical PLP in the 1970s responded to contemporary social upheaval. Roger C. Palms, Editor of the BGEA’s *Decision* magazine, connected PLP to the age in his 1976 book, *God Holds Your Tomorrow*. A former campus pastor at Michigan State University, Palms had authored books on the Jesus People and the occult. *God Holds Your Tomorrows* provided tragic examples of professed Christians whose indulgence in drugs and premarital sex precluded them from finding God’s will for their lives.⁹⁴ Evangelical PLP, no longer limited to disciplined believers discerning a path of exalted service, now targeted the average American Christian eager to determine the limits of cultural absorption. *Take Another Look at Guidance* by Bob Mumford, a leader in the emerging charismatic movement, offered a grim portrait of American life:

Millions of young people try various mind-expanding drugs to ‘find themselves.’ Middle-age couples are stranded in the divorce courts. ‘We made a mistake,’ they sadly say of ten or twenty years together. ‘We didn’t know ourselves or what we wanted in life.’ So life in today’s world seems a confused mess with its riots, pollution, wars, and tight economy—and the most you can do is make the best of it. Or *is* there a right way, a meaningful purpose for your life, a right vocation, a right partner in marriage? Is there a surefire way to *know* who you are and where you’re going? ⁹⁵

Mumford touted the Holy Spirit’s guidance as the antidote to the secular resurgence in occultism and Ouija boards. George Sweeting, President of Moody Bible Institute, similarly noted the “national obsession” with prognostication, demonstrated by a boom in horoscope

⁹⁴ Roger C. Palms, *God Holds Your Tomorrows* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), passim.

⁹⁵ Bob Mumford, *Take Another Look at Guidance* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos Publishing House, 1971), 4.

columns, seances, and psychics. Because only God knew the future, Christians must resist these false prophets and seek God's direction only.⁹⁶

Evangelical psychologist James Dobson, well-known for his 1970 denunciation of permissive childrearing, *Dare to Discipline*, published a PLP text in 1975. Determining God's will for one's "attitudes, home, and way of life," he said, was perhaps "*the* most important question" for Christians. The promise of domestic bliss emanated from the booklet's back cover, which featured a picture of Dobson and his wife bicycling in a lovely residential setting while wearing perfectly tailored sweaters. To discern God's will, Dobson said that feelings and internal impressions were the most direct source of personal guidance, but Christians must ensure that God, rather than Satan or a disturbed psyche, was behind them. Thus, impressions must be scripturally supported, morally right, providentially confirmed, and generally reasonable.⁹⁷

Secondly, evangelical PLP texts did not prioritize missionary service. Although Dobson's text ended with an illustration of submitting to God's will written by a career missionary to Africa, the rest of the book's content and marketing presumed readers were learning how to follow Christ as families in America. Twice, he illustrated false impressions by pointing to parents, one father and mother, who thought God was calling them to neglect family responsibilities for full-time Christian service.⁹⁸ Dobson's seeming disinterest in missions was paralleled in Michael Tucker's 1976 Tyndale release. A pastor of an independent church in California connected to the Jesus People movement, Tucker rejected total separation from popular culture but encouraged instead a Christian subculture that embraced sexual fulfillment in marriage, amusements like television, and contemporary

⁹⁶ George Sweeting, *How to Discover the Will of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 21.

⁹⁷ James Dobson, *Dr. Dobson Talks About—God's Will* (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light, Regal Books, 1975).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 14, 25-27.

fashion such as longer hair on men. The book focused on cultivating families of “spiritual” rather than “carnal” Christians in America; for women, this entailed submitting to male headship. The chapter most directly related to career, “Counting the Cost,” used Abraham as an example of someone who received “God’s best” by leaving all behind to follow him. Instead of connecting this to the contemporary missionary call, Tucker applied the story metaphorically, teaching that ethical behavior within one’s work might require sacrificing success.⁹⁹

Living in God’s Will (Revell, 1976) was written by Dwight Carlson, whose missionary brother Paul Carlson had been killed during the Congolese revolution in 1964.¹⁰⁰ In a chapter on the objective needs of the world, Carlson insisted that needs were important but not synonymous with a call to the mission field. He suggested, too, that the focus on the needs “out there” had led to greater needs at home, both in local churches and in families. Like IVCF’s Howard and Little, Carlson recoiled from the high-pressure appeals to the mission field he heard frequently in his youth.¹⁰¹ *Knowing God’s Will and Doing It!* (Zondervan, 1976) was also tepid about pursuing foreign missions. The author was J. Grant Howard Jr., a Wheaton and Dallas Seminary alumnus who chaired the Ministerial Studies Division of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Grant argued that the Bible exhorted all believers to “preach the gospel everywhere” and to be “willing and available to go anywhere.” That America was “permeated with a gospel witness and other countries have little or no witness would perhaps alert us to a significant ‘opportunity’ to go elsewhere to do God’s will,” he said. Ultimately, Christians should be “sensitive to external

⁹⁹ Michael Tucker, *Live Confidently: How to Know God’s Will* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976), 34-35.

¹⁰⁰ Urbana ’64 commemorated Paul Carlson’s death.

¹⁰¹ Dwight Carlson, *Living God’s Will* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 59-61.

circumstances and counsel, to internal compulsions and contentment” in determining their field of service.¹⁰²

Non-American writers helped maintain neo-evangelical presses’ concern for traditional foreign missions. In *Where Do I Go from Here?* (Tyndale, 1971), Zac Poonen, an Indian national on staff with the Union of Evangelical Students in India, invoked G. Christian Weiss’s teaching that those who ignored a divine missionary call were doomed to receive God’s “second best” plan for their lives.¹⁰³ In 1978 InterVarsity Press published the fourth, revised edition of a treatise on guidance written by Oliver Barclay, a longtime leader in British Inter-Varsity who had been instrumental in fostering that network’s postwar missions interest. Using missionaries as examples throughout the text, Barclay still lauded the role while not limiting divine vocation to it or other ministerial service. A Christian’s career priority should be to further God’s will on earth and to serve others.¹⁰⁴

Thirdly, the concern for self-fulfillment and personal desire figured prominently in many texts. Barclay’s final chapter, an addition from previous versions, addressed professionals who complained about “workplace satisfaction,” as well as “non-Christians” who found “marriage and the home restricting and stuffy.” The answer to both dilemmas, he said, was to cease seeking satisfaction in the job or marriage itself. A Christian who “sees and aims beyond” either state and approaches any tasks “for the glory of God” would find happiness. American evangelicals, meanwhile, were more likely to expect their callings to be inherently fulfilling. Romanticizing the Old Testament, Michael Tucker taught that Abraham’s willingness to obey God’s order to leave his homeland gave him “fulfillment in

¹⁰² J. Grant Howard, *Knowing God’s Will—and Doing It!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 117-18.

¹⁰³ Zac Poonen, *Where Do I Go from Here?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), 17.

¹⁰⁴ Oliver Barclay, *Guidance: What the Bible Says About Knowing God’s Will*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978 [Orig., 1956]), 54-57.

this life.” While he could have been materially “richer” had he stayed in Mesopotamia, he “probably would have lived a dull life.” In Palestine, however, his life was filled with “peace and purpose”; it was an “exciting and enriching experience.”¹⁰⁵ The BGEA’s Palms introduced *God Holds Your Tomorrow* with the chapter, “A Reason for Me,” which tied PLP to individuality. God never made “accidents,” and individuals living in His will would not be “square pegs in round holes.” This included the modern woman. Palms pointed to a suburban mother who had reluctantly sacrificed her “meaningful” career but found fulfillment using her skills to develop neighborhood Bible studies. Palms said, “God is God and has a reason for our existence, and has put together the package that is called ‘me,’ likes what he made, and wants to develop and fulfill ‘me’ as that unique and special individual that I am.”¹⁰⁶ God’s fulfilling plans might well include upward mobility and romance. *You’ve Really Got Me, God: A Young Person’s Search for God’s Will* (Baker, 1977) exchanged a standard biblical and theological exposition of PLP for a series of diary entries written by a fictional teenage male weighing his circumstances against his sense of God’s guidance for major life decisions. Encountering few obstacles, the teenager graduates from high school, goes to college, finds a wife, gets an offer for both a job and a graduate program the same week, and excitedly awaits his wedding day.

Personal desire held a central place in mass-marketed PLP texts. “Many times a Christian can find God’s will by asking, ‘What do I want to do?’” Tucker maintained.¹⁰⁷ Grant Howard drew upon his own experiences, recalling how God confirmed his decision to pursue ministry instead of his family’s business. “For me it was the will of God, confirmed personally by a deep personal desire to go into the ministry and further confirmed by a real feeling of personal contentment about the choice,” he wrote, adding the caveat, “I must

¹⁰⁵ Tucker, *Live Confidently*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Palms, *God Holds Your Tomorrow*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ Tucker, 21-22.

constantly check my emotions with the Word of God. God will never give contentment about doing something opposed to His Word.”¹⁰⁸ Philippians 2:12-13, in his exposition, meant that God instilled believers with the “energy” or “compulsion” to do his will.¹⁰⁹ Richard Strauss, a southern-California megachurch pastor, cited this passage to prove that instead of requiring Christians to “remove any trace of personal desire from their hearts,” God either “gives us what we desire in due time or plants new desires in our hearts.”¹¹⁰

Australian-born J. Sidlow Baxter, an alumnus of Spurgeon’s College in London, Bible teacher, and devotional speaker throughout the U.K. and U.S., conceded in *Does God Still Guide?* (Zondervan, 1971) that he “used to think that the highest point in the Christian life” was to “forego our own will in favour of God’s, whatever the cost” until realizing that attaining new, “sanctified desires” was the goal. In addition to Philippians 2:13, Baxter cited Psalm 37:4-5—“Delight thyself in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass”—to teach that the peak of divine guidance was when “God’s will and our walk coincide.”¹¹¹ Baxter wrote the foreword to a book by his American friend, Charles Blair, a pastor of a Denver megachurch. *Get a Grip on Life* (Zondervan, 1971) answered the questions a survey of 5,000 non-Christians and Christians in Denver revealed were most pressing. The first chapter tackled the second most-asked question (after when Jesus was returning), “How do I know God’s will for my life?” Citing Psalm 37:4, Blair assured readers that “God often gives us the desires of our heart,” and if one loved God more than anything, then one’s desires would reflect that.¹¹² Moody Bible Institute’s Sweeting recommended these passages, as well.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ J. Grant Howard, *Knowing God’s Will*, 98.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁰ Richard Strauss, *Decisions! Decisions! How to Really Know God’s Will* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), 65.

¹¹¹ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Does God Still Guide?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 97-98.

Moody Church pastor Erwin Lutzer agreed that God guided “by the desires He puts within us.”¹¹⁴

John MacArthur’s *Found: God’s Will* (1977, Rev. ed) began with a firm rejection of the “Cosmic Killjoy” view of God.¹¹⁵ After being saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering, a person should seek God’s specific will using the following method: “Do whatever you want!” Citing Psalm 37:4, MacArthur taught, “God does not say He will fulfill all the desires that are there. He says he will put the desires there! If you are living a godly life, He will give you the right desires.” He added, “To seek the will of God is not primarily a place....to go there or to work here. The will of God concerns you as a person. If you are the right you, you can follow your desires and you will fulfill His will.”¹¹⁶

One of the clearest signals of evangelical PLP’s sanguine turn was the frequent appearance of Little’s *Affirming the Will of God* over the next decade. Dobson, Sweeting, Strauss, Coder, and others recommended it,¹¹⁷ and Little shared his message on God’s will in *His*, *Moody Monthly*, and *Campus Life*.¹¹⁸ InterVarsity reissued the booklet after Little’s tragic 1975 death in a car accident.¹¹⁹ Of the books citing Little, the most influential was by M. Blaine Smith, a Fuller Seminary D.Min., West Coast Presbyterian pastor, and

¹¹² Charles Blair, *Get a Grip on Life: Answers to Life’s Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 15-16.

¹¹³ Sweeting, *How to Discover the Will of God*, 47, 68.

¹¹⁴ Erwin Lutzer, *Failure: The Backdoor to Success* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 88.

¹¹⁵ John MacArthur, Jr., *Found: God’s Will*, Rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1977), 5-6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 57, 61.

¹¹⁷ Dobson, *Dr. Dobson Talks*, 31; Sweeting, *How to Discover*, 45, 81, 98; Strauss, *Decisions!* 118; Coder, *God’s Will for You*, 174. See also Charles Coleman, *Guidance: That Voice Behind You* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros., 1977), 24; Bernice and Leslie Flynn, *God’s Will: You Can Know It* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979), 130.

¹¹⁸ Little, “How Good is God’s Will,” *HIS* (April 1971), 1-4; *Ibid*, “Where do I go from here?” *Moody Monthly* (May 1974): 104-109; *Ibid*, “God’s Plan for You,” *Campus Life* (February 1975), 51-60.

¹¹⁹ *Idem.*, *Affirming the Will of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976).

contemporary gospel musician. In 1979 InterVarsity Press published Smith's *Knowing God's Will: Biblical Principles of Guidance* with a foreword by Richard Halverson; after selling over 125,000 copies, it was reissued in 1991 as an InterVarsity Press Contemporary Christian Classic. The book was a product of Smith's organization, Nehemiah Ministries, founded in 1978 in suburban Washington, D.C. to help "Christians realize their personal potential" as "unique individuals." the name inspired by biblical prophet Nehemiah's support for musicians. With so many individuals "seriously confused" about God's will, due to the myriad of available choices, Smith considered guidance the central concern of 1970s Christians.¹²⁰ In *Knowing God's Will*, Smith pinpointed a source of much confusion:

One of the most highly emphasized teachings in Christian circles today is that God has designed a unique plan for the life of each believer. 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life' is law one of Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws, the world's most popular evangelistic tract. This teaching is, of course, an important one, worthy of emphasis, for it deepens our trust in God's capacity to guide us. But unfortunately many Christians reach the unjustified conclusion that they need to discover something of God's future plan for their lives in order to assess his will for each present decision.¹²¹

As chapter four argued, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" originally referred to the joy and peace offered to all born-again persons; if Smith's observations were correct, since the early 1950s the meaning indeed had shifted to a detailed life plan.

The influence of both Paul Little and the gospel of God's plan shone through Smith's text. When it came to trusting one's desires, he struck a blow against 1940s-era calls for self-denial. On one hand, he recognized the validity of sacrificing to be successful in one's vocation—a doctor needing to miss some church activities to be on call, for example. But self-denial should not, Smith taught, determine the choice of vocation. He referenced a girl raised in a "church which had put an unhealthy emphasis on denying natural aspirations" by teaching that one "should enter a profession mainly for the opportunity it presents to serve

¹²⁰ Blaine Smith, "Nehemiah Ministries: A Brief History," <http://nehemiahministries.com/about.htm> (Accessed June 10, 2018).

¹²¹ M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (New York: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 21.

others...even if this means doing the very thing you do not want to do.” Entering college intending to become a medical missionary, she discovered she liked accounting but hated science, and a campus minister showed her that “God had not made her the way she was by accident,” as “her interests and potential were a strong sign of God’s vocational direction.” Smith said she was under “no obligation” to obey the previously felt missions call, as God had used it to direct her to a specific college and a different career. For another person, God may have used the same factors to lead them to medical missions. “But then the person’s temperament would probably be clearly inclined in that direction,” he clarified, adding that people had a “right and responsibility to consider...personality make-up a vital indication of God’s leading.” Noting that this girl now worked happily stateside, Smith seemingly ignored the possibility that the mission field might need accountants, too!¹²² When evaluating one’s desires, Smith’s first rule was the following: “Not only should desire for personal fulfillment be present, but there should also be a genuine urge to see other people helped through the vocation.” Students should, therefore, “experiment” with vocations not “naturally attractive but where the human need is great,” for example, by taking a short-term missions trip.¹²³

1970s evangelicals had embraced desire as an indicator of God’s will. Yet did God’s providence mean that Christians should pursue their dreams without concern for market demand? Early in the decade, Mumford had noted the “tight economy” as a reason why God’s guidance mattered so much. As the economy worsened throughout the decade, it seemed that Baby Boomer evangelicals expected their futures, if not their current prospects, to remain bright. In 1976 *HIS* printed a reflection by a young man with a Master’s degree who had settled for menial employment at a general store. Many of his peers, he claimed, were accepting jobs “far removed from their talents and training.” The situation prompted him to look “for clues about God’s working and will” in his own life. “As I have questioned,

¹²² Ibid., 119-21.

¹²³ Ibid., 91-92.

[God] has revealed to me from His Word...his promises and responsibilities.” Not only had God promised to meet a Christian’s physical needs, but the Parable of the Talents taught him that by faithfully exercising his “God-given abilities in difficult circumstances,” God would “expand [his] opportunities to use them.” He concluded, “Despite the job market, therefore, I anticipate eventual employment which will allow me a broad use of my training.” Anyone facing the same disappointments should acknowledge God’s promises and their own responsibilities, resulting in “a more complete trust in God’s guidance and increased thanksgiving for his direction, both negative and positive.”¹²⁴ At the decade’s end, Smith conceded that 1970s youth, particularly seminarians, should beware the tough job market. Yet his illustrations implied that Christians should not settle for any job available. He referenced a young man who, having declined a good job offer without another in hand, was suddenly offered an ideal job for which he had never applied.¹²⁵

Although Urbana ’79 did not feature a plenary talk on the subject of God’s will, Smith’s advice was promoted on the book table.¹²⁶ Out of the 16,500 delegates, 8,000 signed World Evangelism Decision cards saying, “I have no definite leading at this time but will seek God’s will.” 8.9% (1,471) said, “I believe it is God’s will for me to serve Him abroad, and I will make prayer and inquiry to this end.” The increase from Urbana ’70, when less than 2% of delegates made this decision, seemed to represent a revival of missionary commitment. It is important to note that the “serve Him abroad” option did not specify full-time, career missionary service. Students were presented with many options, including short-term missions. Ruth Siemens highlighted “tent-making ministry,” or self-supported, non-professional missionary work where one uses a “secular avenue” as a door to evangelize in

¹²⁴ W. Meredith Long, “God’s Will and the Job Market,” *HIS*, June 1976, 1.

¹²⁵ Smith, 122-23.

¹²⁶ Idem., “Nehemiah Ministries: A Brief History,” <http://nehemiahministries.com/about.htm> (Accessed June 10, 2018). Smith claims it sold “3,500 copies in three days” at Urbana ’79.

their local sphere, following the Apostle Paul's work to fund his missionary journeys. Tent-making provided numerous new vocational options, particularly for women still denied ministry roles. This avenue also broadened "cross-cultural evangelism" to include opportunities for professional development and upward mobility. Siemens noted, "You can even do student teaching abroad and earn a credential while you make Jesus Christ known." Two-year internships with overseas, multi-national corporations, she added, "look great on your resume later."¹²⁷

God Has a Plan for Your Life—Or Does He?

While Blaine Smith's tome influenced the IVCF network, a more controversial book on God's will was in preparation. Its author, Garry Friesen, had grown up in the Detroit, MI, chapter of Youth for Christ, serving as a regional director in college. Entering Dallas Seminary in 1969, he settled on a dissertation topic close to heart, owing to his prior struggle to choose a college: discerning God's will for one's life.¹²⁸ Surveying a variety of popular mass-market books, systematic theologies, and articles from broadly evangelical—i.e., not limited to *neo-evangelical*—journals, Friesen identified what he called the "Traditional View" of discerning one's "divine life plan." This view's distinguishing mark was its avowal of internal "impressions," or a sense of the Holy Spirit's leading, as the main source of guidance. It was the view he had been taught as a young adult, especially on the conference circuit (including Urbana). Friesen rejected the Traditional View, arguing that believers could not know the will of God. But there was more: God, in fact, had not

¹²⁷ Ruth Siemens, "The Messenger and New Avenues," in *Believing and Obeying Jesus Christ: The Urbana '79 Compendium*, ed. John W. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 218.

¹²⁸ Garry Friesen, interview with author by telephone, 28 June 2017.

orchestrated detailed blueprints for individuals' lives. Rather, believers must heed God's revealed, *moral* will and make their own decisions based on "wisdom."¹²⁹

Friesen alleviated the individual's obligation to stress and sweat over finding God's *perfect* will for one's life—because it did not exist! A person was free to pursue any desires that were wise and aligned to God's moral will. Applied to missions, the "wisdom view" revived the objective call to service. The "bottom line" on missions, he said, was the following: "*Rather than waiting for some kind of mystical 'call' from God, every believer should respond to the revealed will of God by giving serious consideration to becoming a cross-cultural missionary.*" The "mind-boggling" statistics of unreached people underscored the need to consider going but talents were the final determinant. "Obedience to the command to be faithful stewards requires all believers to evaluate whether they have the God-given capability to best fulfill the Great Commission by personally taking the gospel to people in another culture. Those who do should go. Those who don't should send."¹³⁰ Regarding individual desires, the Traditional View held that these could be a "road sign pointing to God's individual will." The Wisdom View obviated the need for unreliable, "introspective guesswork." Instead, Friesen explained, "Personal desires that have been declared acceptable by God's moral will and by wisdom can be an excellent source" of guidance. Scripture's command to "serve God eagerly with all our hearts," he said, could be "more easily obeyed if one's decisions [were] in harmony with one's personal inclinations."¹³¹ A friend and Wheaton College alumnus, Robin Maxson, helped him publish the thesis as a digestible book for the average person in the pews. Convinced of the project's importance, Maxson's 100-person church provided a sabbatical, a secluded writing space, a

¹²⁹ Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, *Decision-Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980).

¹³⁰ Friesen, *Decision Making*, 330.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

car, and feedback on drafts. In 1980, the Oregon-based Multnomah Press released the first edition of *Decision Making and the Will of God*, a 400-page treatise which, over the next two decades, sold over 100,000 copies.¹³²

The book was polarizing. On one side, *Campus Life* deemed it an “Editor’s Choice” selection in the 1981 Book Awards,¹³³ and *Christianity Today*’s reviewer “highly recommended” it as “the best available treatment of this topic.”¹³⁴ On the other side, Moody Church’s Erwin Lutzer voiced offense at Friesen’s insistence that any Christian leader claiming to have been divinely led into the vocation had been deluded.¹³⁵ The book reviewer for fundamentalist Baptist Bob Jones’s magazine said that Friesen was telling Christians to seek guidance completely “apart from the will of God,” opining, “Mr. Friesen’s God apparently could work in the first century, but now must be impotent.”¹³⁶ Friesen himself recalled being labeled a “deist.”¹³⁷

One particularly harsh response emanated from southern California, from none other than Bill Bright. According to Friesen, friends working for CCC relayed that Bright, then on a nationwide fundraising tour, was publicly branding him a “heretic.” In truth, the will of God happened to be a touchy subject for the parachurch magnate, who was raising support for a Christian university he hoped to launch under CCC’s auspices, despite internal debate over the project’s \$500 million price tag and seeming incompatibility with evangelistic

¹³² Sales figure given on the cover of the 25th-anniversary edition of the book. See Friesen and Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*, Rev. ed. (New York: Waterbrook/Multnomah, 2004).

¹³³ “The Winner’s Circle: Top Books of ’81: Editors’ Choice,” *Campus Life*, July/August 1981, 27.

¹³⁴ G. Van Campbell, “Knowing God’s Will,” *CT*, March 4, 1983, 100, 103.

¹³⁵ Erwin Lutzer, “Still Called to the Ministry,” *Moody Monthly*, March 1983.

¹³⁶ Stewart Custer, “Decision-Making Apart from the Will of God,” *Faith for the Family*, March 1983, 13-14.

¹³⁷ Friesen, phone interview with author, 28 June 2017.

priorities. Bright rebuffed the criticism, convinced that God was leading him to establish the university. However, CCC soon encountered zoning issues with the land secured for the campus, precipitating a battle with San Diego, CA voters. The rescinded property agreement flummoxed Bright, who had continually insisted that God had given him the plan for the university and the specific plot of land.¹³⁸ For an executive already beleaguered by staff dissent and soaring debt, an outsider claiming that neither Bright nor any Christian could ascertain God's specific will did not help.

CCC staffer Linda Raney Wright, a budding theologian, spearheaded the charge against Friesen, informing Bright in a memo that *Decision Making* had prompted staffers to question whether they were “really led on staff” or were “really led to the one they married.” Most disconcertingly, Wright complained, “The book is so convincingly written that I believe it has the potential of undermining the leadership of Crusade. That is, if God doesn't lead specifically what are we doing following a leader that says that God impressed him to do such and such?”¹³⁹ Hoping to clear the air, in 1983 Friesen attended CCC's annual theology training conference and met with Bright privately for thirty minutes. According to Friesen, Bright admitted that he had not read *Decision Making* but had been alerted to its contents by staffers. He then explained his position on knowing God's will—the “Sound Mind Principle” articulated in the 1963 Paul Brown Letter. To Friesen, the Sound Mind Principle had much in common with his “Wisdom View” approach, as both systems suggested rational aids such as pro-con lists. However, Bright's system allowed for God to lead one through subjective impressions. Perhaps, Bright was defending only his ability to recognize God's leading. While everyone at CCC was gracious to Friesen, Bright did not change his stance and barred Friesen's book from the staff library. Wright worked with

¹³⁸ Ibid. See also Turner, 203-208, for a fuller account of the university debacle.

¹³⁹ Linda Raney Wright to Bill Bright, ca. November 1983, D0313, No. 0918, CRUA.

CCC's theologians to prepare a 99-page treatise on the issues raised.¹⁴⁰ Marking his comments on the paper, Bright noted, "Write out Phil. 2:13—find best translation," below the main paragraph teaching that God guided through internal impressions.¹⁴¹ After CCC's theologians recommended the Paul Brown Letter as the best treatment on knowing God's will, Bright ordered staff leaders to reemphasize it throughout the organization.¹⁴²

Within CCC, *Decision Making and the Will of God* had triggered a crisis of authority. Though more subtly than Bright, IVCF apparently also rejected Friesen's thesis—even though it shared affinities with the IVP books by Barclay and Smith. Barclay taught, "my contention is that [God] has never promised to lead us through inward convictions but through wisdom, judgment, and advice based upon...the Scriptures."¹⁴³ Smith, who referenced Barclay approvingly, agreed that too many believers "put an unhealthy emphasis on inward guidance," often misinterpreting feelings as direct communication from God. Impressions were more likely, he explained, to reflect one's deepest desires or moral conscience. Yet Smith diverged from Friesen by stating the following: "I would not want to say that God never speaks through our intuition or that he never influences our feelings in order to tell us something. To say this would be severely restrictive of God's providence, and the experiences of numerous Christians suggest otherwise."¹⁴⁴ A fine distinction, it carried major implications.

¹⁴⁰ "Decision Making and Your Walk with God," Response to Garry Friesen, D0313, No. 0918, CRUA.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴² Bright to CCC staff leaders, February 13, 1985, D0313, No. 09818, CRUA.

¹⁴³ Barclay, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, 79.

One IVCF staffer, a friend of Friesen, unsuccessfully lobbied Urbana organizers to invite the author to speak on guidance.¹⁴⁵ Instead, they asked Robert Munger, a Presbyterian pastor in Berkeley, CA, and former Fuller Seminary professor of evangelism and church strategy. Munger was nationally known for his 1955 tract, *My Heart—Christ’s Home*, which he wrote not long after leaving Hollywood Presbyterian and Henrietta Mears’s mentorship. Uncannily evoking Friesen’s text, Munger opened with a hypothetical dialogue between a college student and a pastor about determining God’s will for his vocation, location, and marriage. Later in the address, Munger directly cited Smith’s *Knowing God’s Will*, specifically his analogy of a shepherd guiding sheep to God guiding believers. This meant that Christians need not be “anxious about getting the right directions from God,” he said, or be concerned about having “the courage to follow” such direction:

Instead, we are simply to put ourselves in the shepherd’s care. If we want to do his will, he will see to it that we have the necessary information and put within us the desire and the energy to move out with him. He is able even to overrule past mistakes and in the process mature us in Christian life and service. The words of the apostle Paul encourage us: ‘God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose’ (Phil 2.13 TEV).¹⁴⁶

Munger shared Mears’s breakthrough verse on guidance as one of his main principles. While encouraging students to heed the objective need for world evangelization in making their plans, his concluding story promulgated the internalized, impressionistic, near-mystical view of PLP. He recalled his experience as a new Christian, when he boarded a train for graduate school, feeling “profoundly lonely and anxious.” He wondered where God truly wanted him and what He wanted him to do while there:

Would I really find joy and fulfillment serving Christ, or would I regret the step I had taken? Suddenly I sensed Another’s presence. It seemed as though Jesus himself came by my side, saying, ‘I am with you and will be with you always. I’m in charge

¹⁴⁵ Friesen, phone interview with author, 28 June 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Munger, “Knowing God’s Will,” in *Confessing Christ as Lord: The Urbana 81 Compendium*, ed. John W. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 151.

here. Relax. Trust me! Enjoy the journey!’ So the years have gone by. I have no regrets at all, only profound gratitude. He has kept faith.¹⁴⁷

In Munger’s portrayal, the will of God unfolded like a journey, guided by the direct, immediate presence of Christ.

Out of 14,000 attendees at Urbana ’81, over 7,500 signed revised World Evangelism Decision cards. 1,800 indicated, “it is God’s will for me to serve Him abroad,” while 4,975 said, “Convinced that I have a part in God’s plan for the world, I will actively seek His will for me by increasing my awareness by an involvement in world missions.”¹⁴⁸ The 1981 decision card, revised from the 1979 edition, offered delegates a third option, selected by 686: “I will support world missions with money earned from my business or professional skills, both while I am in school and after I graduate.”¹⁴⁹ According to a later tally, over 90% of delegates submitted cards.¹⁵⁰ Whether as a worker in America’s inner-city ghettos, a tent-making professional overseas, an international student, a short-term missionary, or a faithful giver at home, by the early 1980s young evangelicals were presented with innumerable, fulfilling, non-traditional ways to play a part in God’s plan for the world.

Conclusion

Venerated writer Frederick Beuchner, an ordained mainline Presbyterian, offered the following resonant definition of “vocation” in 1973: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹⁵¹ Evangelicals entered the 1980s in agreement, convinced that God’s plan for their lives should fulfill both personal

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

¹⁴⁸ Urbana ’81: Statistics, box 291, folder 13, IVCF Records, BGCA.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander, ed. *Confessing Christ as Lord: The Urbana 81 Compendium* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 11.

¹⁵⁰ Winter, “Student Volunteers of 1886,” 177.

¹⁵¹ Frederick Beuchner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

desires and some responsibility to world evangelization. But they disagreed over the extent to which one could know God's *actual and specific* will for their lives, with a strong contingent still clamoring for assurance. Evangelicals also wanted to know God's complete plans for the world. *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, released in 1970 by Campus Crusade staffer Hal Lindsey, was the *New York Times*'s bestselling non-fiction book of the entire decade. How did Lindsey perceive the relationship between the two realms of God's plan? Recognizing that any day could be their last on earth before the Rapture, Christians should live with optimism and excitement.¹⁵² He said, "we should plan our lives as though we will be here for our full life expectancy but live as though Christ may come today. We shouldn't drop out of school or worthwhile community activities, or stop working, or rush marriage, or any such thing *unless Christ clearly leads us to do so* [emphasis added]."¹⁵³ But how could one discern Christ's leading? As the final classes of Baby-Boomer evangelicals entered adulthood, they had multiple answers to this question but only one final authority: self.

¹⁵² Sutton, *American Apocalypse*: 326-66.

¹⁵³ Hal Lindsey, *The Late, Great, Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, eighteenth printing, 1980 [orig., 1970]), 188.

Thesis Conclusion

“God has a plan for your life” implies belief in a God who providentially governs and guides the individual throughout various life decisions, particularly a vocation, and that the individual can and should discern the divine plan. This thesis has attempted to measure and assess the significance of PLP to postwar American evangelicalism through the following questions: What are the origins of this teaching? How closely was it associated with the missionary movement? To what extent did God’s “wonderful” plan for one’s life stem from rising national prosperity? To what extent did God’s will become more individualistic? How did popular manuals on discerning God’s plan compare to mainstream self-help literature? How did PLP respond to changing gender norms? To what extent did PLP’s ethos shift from self-denial to self-fulfillment? Overall, how did PLP adapt to postwar American culture, in ways reflecting either evangelical accommodation or resistance to secularization?

Origins of PLP

Chapter One has shown that PLP’s closest ancestors were mid-nineteenth century Higher Life/Keswick teaching on guidance and Horace Bushnell’s teaching in *Sermons for the New Life* that every man’s life was a plan of God. These strands converged after the Businessmen’s Revival of 1857-58 and continued into Keswick’s American heir, the Victorious Life conference, through the leaders of the *Sunday School Times*. PLP was a practical rather than theoretical message, transatlantic rather than uniquely American. Guidance in one’s daily affairs and in major decisions could be ascertained by looking for, as F.B. Meyer put it in *The Secret of Guidance*, the three “lights”—internal impressions, scripture, and providential circumstances. Influenced by Common Sense philosophy, the idea that a Christian not only could, but was required to, discern God’s specific will with certainty was commonplace.

PLP therefore functioned within evangelical spirituality and identity as a necessary connecting link between David Bebbington's two defining characteristics of conversionism and activism. Once one became a believer, God began to guide in a special way, entailing a commission to some sort of work—evangelistic or otherwise. If the Westminster Divines saw man's chief end as "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever," then the modern evangelical viewed it as to "do the will of God." As evangelicals have commonly believed in divine providence, what was new in the late nineteenth century was the individualistic, methodical approach to discerning God's guidance.¹

Missions Movement and Self-Denial

With the rise of the Student Volunteer Movement and dispensational premillennialism at the turn of the century, PLP became tied to foreign missions. As Chapter Two showed, IVCF and YFC revived this emphasis, which had declined in the ecumenical student movement. After a 1945 merger with the Bible College-based Student Foreign Missions Fellowship, IVCF called its university-student constituency to reconsider whether God wanted to them to serve in gospel-saturated America instead of unreached, overseas territory. YFC followed IVCF's lead but also tied evangelism to one's patriotic duty. PLP, like the overall evangelical missionary movement, was energized by the nation's wartime sacrifice, as seen by the frequent use of military metaphors for serving in God's army. As shown in Chapter Three, in southern California, Henrietta Mears and her Hollywood Presbyterian colleagues exhorted promising university students to be "expendables" for Christ's cause. In "such a time as this," with the United States supposedly providentially leading the world, Mears, IVCF, and YFC mobilized their young constituencies to their duty. The ethos of self-denial permeated the discernment component of PLP, alongside an emphasis on vocation. Romans 12:1-2, which taught that Christians should separate

¹ Perhaps, belief in providence should be considered integral to evangelical identity, in contrast to the Holy Spirit, the latter position argued by Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1; and Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

themselves from the world, be living sacrifices, and then receive the knowledge of God's perfect will, underscored the spirituality of discernment. Other verses cited stressed that the individual who trusted and obeyed God would find the right path. Although holy living was considered integral to PLP, extent of separation from "worldliness" became increasingly unclear, as evangelical students attended secular institutions and encountered Hollywood-driven popular culture.

Challenges of Communism and Nationalism

The Cold War context of the 1950s and early 1960s transformed PLP in several ways, as traced in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. First, as Communism and nationalism stymied missionary advance, the expectation for God to call one to a specific country faded, replaced by a new focus on the Holy Spirit's unique, continual leading of the individual. Mears's 1952 epiphany about how God guided did not arise from the mission field; nevertheless, on her tour of East Asia that year it spoke to missionaries ousted from China who wondered if they had misinterpreted God's leading. The Great Commission remained in effect, David Adeney insisted, but the individual should rely on the Holy Spirit to give "to every man his work." Nevertheless, Communism provided evangelical leaders with an example of total sacrifice for a cause—which fueled the ongoing call to surrender one's will. Second, an increasing awareness of resistance to Anglo-American missionaries chastened unbridled enthusiasm, especially at Urbana. A sincere missionary call should arise from reason rather than emotion and guilt, and it should be accompanied by knowledge, commitment, and preparation for the task. As the colonial era ended, IVCF developed a more sophisticated program for its Urbana conventions which adapted the missionary call to global upheaval and anti-Western backlash. Third, the Cold War inspired a new mission strategy in southern California—saving civilization by winning cultural influencers for Christ. For Richard Halverson and Bill Bright, this strategy entailed reaching secularized professionals and elite university students with the gospel of God's plan. Following CCC's lead, starting in the latter 1950s, YFC specialized in ministering to America's teenagers,

whose opportunities for influence abounded. God's plan for the individual was presented as an attractive, inspirational message rather than as an exhortation to one's duty—the ultimate path to abundant, exciting living and self-actualization. While this could include missionary service, particularly short-term, this was not the point.

Thus, by the 1970s objective evangelistic need abroad was no longer equated with a call to lifelong service, as Chapter Five has shown. PLP's connection to missions had been variously spiritualized, professionally specialized, and domesticated. This is significant for scholarship on missions history, which has focused largely on evangelicals' changing views of the relationship between evangelism and social concern. Just as important as the collective identity of missions was individual missionary motivation. Did evolving teaching on the missionary call explain why students no longer volunteered for service? Or were Baby Boomers expecting comfortable, prosperous, "wonderful" lives?

American Prosperity

The original meaning of "God has a wonderful plan for your life," as presented by Mears, was that by surrendering one's will to God's, one would enjoy a spiritually rather than materially abundant life. However, her independent wealth, movie-star mansion, and world travels imparted a more literal meaning to "wonderful." From its origins in elite southern California, by the mid-1960s, the message of God's "wonderful" plan had been disseminated in mass through her *God's Plan for My Life* curriculum, the Four Spiritual Laws, Graham's *Hour of Decision*, Halverson's writings for businessmen, and YFC's "Decade of Destiny" program. American economic expansion did not produce this message but seemed to corroborate it, as more Americans, especially Baby Boomer youth, could expect a relatively prosperous life. Furthermore, as Halverson and Bright recognized, PLP perfectly complemented free-market capitalism against Communism. God had a unique plan for every individual that required developing one's talents and pursuing self-interest. This will be discussed more below.

Gender

The assumption that God had a wonderful plan for women, too, was tied to the evolving missionary movement and to views of the Holy Spirit. American evangelicals in the 1950s lauded traditional gender roles while also providing women, especially unmarried ones, with numerous opportunities for service in parachurch organizations and foreign-mission agencies. In the 1970s, the parachurch offered female leadership roles. In Mears's circle, the comparisons made between the 1949 Forest Home Awakening and the Acts 2 narrative of Pentecost demonstrated belief the Holy Spirit was calling both sons and daughters to prophesy in the last days. Mears, herself, was shaped by multiple experiences of faith healing and infilling of the Holy Spirit's power. Like the biblical Esther or Deborah, she considered herself to have an anointing from God that gave her teaching and leadership power. In a similar way, Elisabeth Elliot, after her experiences on the foreign mission field, conceded that God had changed her "categories" of what was okay for a woman to do. Although she decried secular feminism's attack on womanhood in the 1970s, she and Vonette Bright taught, by word and example, that God might call certain women to service both in and outside the home.²

Even more significantly, women shaped evangelical belief in God's will for all Christians—not just for fellow women. Mears, often portrayed as a strategist and king-maker, should be credited with distinctly influencing evangelical thought on PLP through her Sunday School curriculum, public lectures, and private counselling around the world. Similarly, Elliot's experience-based musings on God's will in *Through Gates of Splendor* and *A Slow and Certain Light* became modern evangelical classics. Both women taught (Mears in the 1950s, Elliot in the 1970s) that one's very thoughts and desires could align with God's. Then in the 1980s, when CCC's position on God's will was challenged, it was a

² See ch. 4, 217-18; ch. 6, 260-64.

woman (Linda Raney Wright) who led the initiative to reaffirm God's subjective leading of individuals.³

Accommodation: Individualism and self-fulfillment?

Assessing to what extent PLP reflected evangelical accommodation to postwar America's increasingly therapeutic, individualistic, and fulfillment-oriented culture is a complex task. Did the gospel of God's plan, for example, show that evangelicals no longer cared about eternal salvation as much as they did about temporal happiness? According to James Davison Hunter, the fact that the Four Spiritual Laws tract equivocated about hell indicated just that.⁴ This interpretation, however, does not give enough weight to the 1950s historical context which produced the message. Bright did not preach a gospel of God's plan solely to soothe Cold War anxiety with platitudes—*a la* Peale. For evangelicals, God could not be reduced to a sympathetic friend, a guardian angel, or a heavenly genie; efficacious prayer, likewise, could not be reframed as positive thinking. The gospel of God's plan presented a deity who was equally immanent and transcendent. He providentially guided the believer in daily, "secular" life, while remaining the sovereign ruler of history. For Bright, Graham, and Halverson, the God stamped onto coins and invoked in public was not the biblical God of the universe. Before hearing about hell, God himself needed to be reaffirmed.

Other than discussing God's plan in more therapeutic terms, did evangelical Baby Boomers increasingly entertain subjective notions of God's will after the 1960s? Did PLP reflect evangelicals' accommodation to the "culture of choice and expressive individualism?"⁵ The teaching that God had a plan for the individual's life that could be discerned was, of course, not new, having arisen in the nineteenth century. Even then, the quest to discern God's will was not devoid of individualism and subjectivity, as impressions

³ See ch. 6, 283-84.

⁴ James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 88-89.

⁵ Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, 94.

upon one's mind were indeed considered a way for God to reveal His will. Experience, not simply scripture, informed evangelicals' epistemology. However, in the evangelicalism of the 1940s this subjective component was disciplined by intense self-denial, rigorous Bible study and prayer, and the collective task of world evangelization. Starting in the early 1950s with Mears, however, evangelicals began to display more confidence that a "mature" believer could know God's will with less striving and worrying and with a greater confidence that God would work out His will through a person's normal thought processes. But how "mature" did a Christian need to be to assume that they could, as Mears once put it about herself, assume that they were literally the "walking will of God?" To what extent this change reflected either a heightened trust in the Holy Spirit or a growing confidence in the self is difficult to determine.

Chapters Five and Six have suggested that where PLP more clearly displayed accommodation to postwar American culture was in the extent to which God's providence was *personalized* to fit one's personal talents, psychological make-up, and—crucially—desires. Evangelical leaders, some influenced by humanistic psychology, taught youth that God intended them to become their best selves.⁶ As IVCF's Paul Little put it, rather than begrudgingly "surrender," believers should joyfully "affirm" God's will, believers God affirmed them as individuals.⁷ Psalm 37:4 appeared more frequently in PLP literature in the 1970s, as writers taught that a Christian could assume that his or her desires were given by God and thus indicated His will—a major reversal from the 1940s. As ministry leaders questioned the World War II generation's stress on self-denial and objective evangelistic need, evangelical youth were presented with a more sanguine view of themselves, of God, and "worldliness."⁸

⁶ Ch. 4, 160-61; Ch. 5, 219-21.

⁷ Ch. 6, 243-44, 252.

⁸ Ch. 6, 246-47, 270-76.

As Hunter's early 1980s surveys revealed, by then students at evangelical collegians and seminarians ranked self-fulfillment superior to financial rewards in their work. In addition, they were more likely than their public-university peers to agree that for Christians, "realizing your full potential as a human being is just as important as putting others before you."⁹ Does this not prove that evangelicals had accommodated—even over-accommodated—to postwar American culture, wherein an unpredictable, postindustrial economy prompted bourgeois job hunters to value their dreams over market demand?¹⁰ Evangelicals did imbibe some of the theory and popular parlance of humanistic psychology, and they had relaxed their restrictions on secular amusements.¹¹ Although they looked more like the "world," in some respects, this thesis suggests that they experienced their own "Me Decade(s)." Against an unpredictable, postcolonial missionary economy, parachurch leaders and PLP manuals taught youth that they were obligated to develop their God-given gifts and interests rather than to surrender all to the traditional foreign-missionary vocation. Heading overseas remained an option—and an increasingly attractive one, too, as the Peace Corps, multinational corporations, and short-term trips beckoned America's best and brightest. Beyond the question of self-fulfillment, PLP carries important implications for the history of postwar evangelicalism.

Relationship to contemporary scholarship

If, as Molly Worthen has argued, successive crises of authority characterized postwar evangelicalism, the debate over God's will should be considered one of them. Amid institutional debates over theology and social issues, evangelical laypeople and leaders were concerned rightly to discern the will of God for their individual lives and for collective organizational decisions.¹² Garry Friesen's thesis that a believer could not ascertain the

⁹ Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 55-56, 66.

¹⁰ Ch. 6, 266-67.

¹¹ Ch. 5, 219-21, 223-25.

divine will troubled those, like Bright, who were convinced that God could lead through subjective, inward means. On a broader scale, PLP sheds light on the sequel to the neo-evangelical battle for the Bible. In the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, conservative, evangelical leaders affirmed the total historic and scientific accuracy of the Bible. Yet, as theologian J.I. Packer observed a few years thereafter, “The work of Summit I had hardly been completed when it became evident that there was yet another major task to be tackled. While we recognize that belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is basic to maintaining its authority, the values of that commitment are only as real as one’s understanding of the meaning of Scripture.”¹³ Although evangelicals maintained that God would never lead an individual in a manner contradictory to biblical teaching, they used a variety of translations and paraphrases and read the Bible in different ways—with some expecting certain verses to speak to them personally during the Quiet Time. The increasing trust in personal desires to indicate divine leading undoubtedly complicated biblical interpretation.

Other than authority, PLP enriches the story of evangelicals’ conservative-progressive social divide in the 1970s.¹⁴ As both sides reconsidered the relationship between God’s will for the individual and for society, progressives unsurprisingly favored a more communitarian, anti-capitalist approach to PLP than did conservatives. However, the missionary movement encouraged conservatives to rethink God’s plan for both women, as mentioned above, and for America. The recognition that U.S. agencies should no longer

¹² Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in Modern Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013).

¹³ <http://www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-hermeneutics> (Accessed May 15, 2018). See also, Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 297-304.

¹⁴ Of this vast literature, see Stephen Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011); Brantley Gassaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

dominate overseas evangelization suppressed unchecked American nationalism among neo-evangelicals.

The “Americanness” of PLP

Ultimately, the evidence presented in this thesis suggests that postwar evangelical PLP was a response to the growing availability of choices in modern urban-suburban American society: choice of education providers, location, career, spouse, lifestyle, and even service roles. Its prominence in neo-evangelicalism was a testament to the movement’s increasingly middle-class, upwardly mobile constituency, and the strength it drew from youth movements during an of expanding higher education and student power. White American students after World War II—whether enrolled in elite universities, Christian colleges, Bible institutes, or high schools—were presented with immense opportunities and intense obligation to make the most of them. But American youth, especially white Baby Boomers, certainly were not the only Christians who sought to know and to do God’s will. International students had attended the Urbana conventions since the 1940s, for example. Additionally, the gospel of God’s plan has reached millions worldwide since its 1950s emergence, especially after CCC translated and disseminated the Four Spiritual Laws tract for dozens of nations. Was the teaching that God’s plan was “wonderful” as easily accepted in Majority World communities afflicted by poverty, war, and disease? What was the relationship between neo-evangelical PLP, which presumed God would provide one’s basic needs, and one of the most debated developments in contemporary global Christianity, the Prosperity Gospel? To clarify its major drivers, PLP should be traced from the 1980s through the Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life* era, and situated within non-white, non-affluent, and non-American contexts. Given Warren’s Southern Baptist affiliation, PLP’s embrace or influence by that group should be explored, as well. Ultimately, there is ample evidence to suggest that after being “born again,” the individual American evangelical was concerned by one question above all others: How do I find God’s plan for my life?

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